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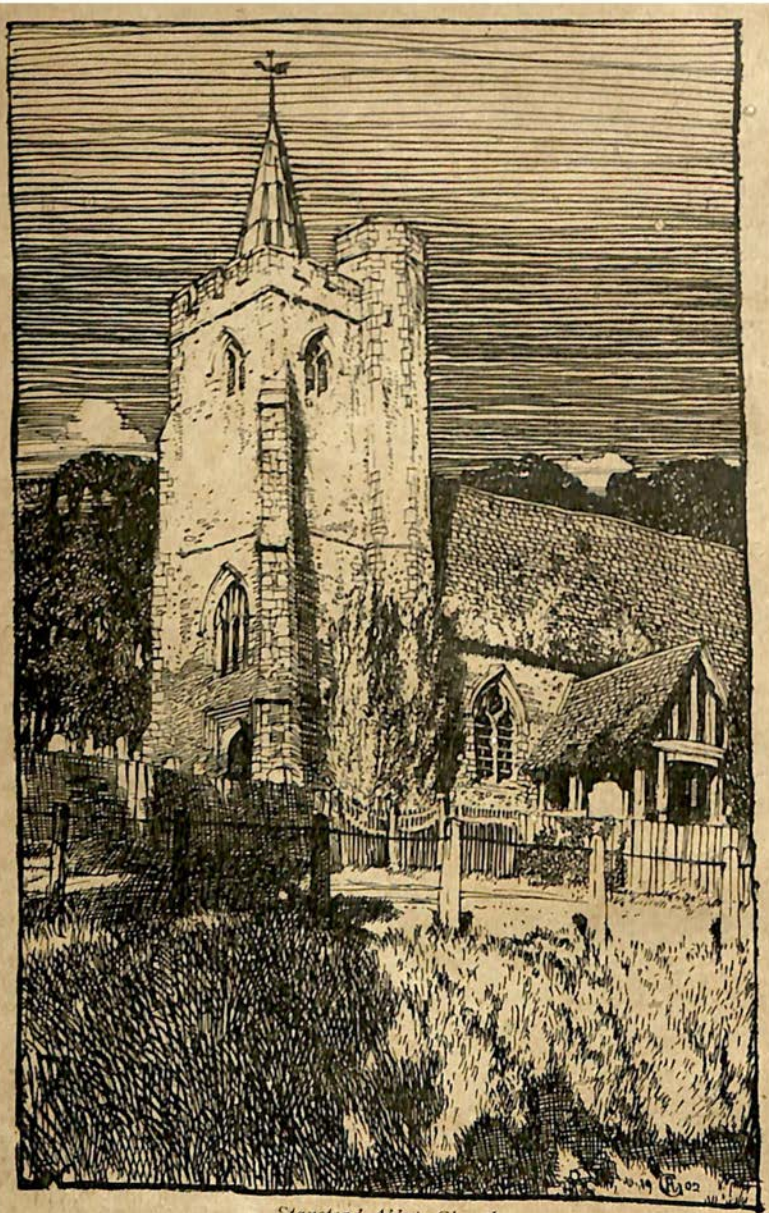
HIGHWAYS AND BYWAYS

IN

HERTFORDSHIRE



Stanstead Abbots Church.

Highways and Byways in Hertfordshire

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BY

HERBERT W. TOMPKINS, F.R.Hist.S.

WITH · ILLUSTRATIONS · BY

FREDERICK L. GRIGGS

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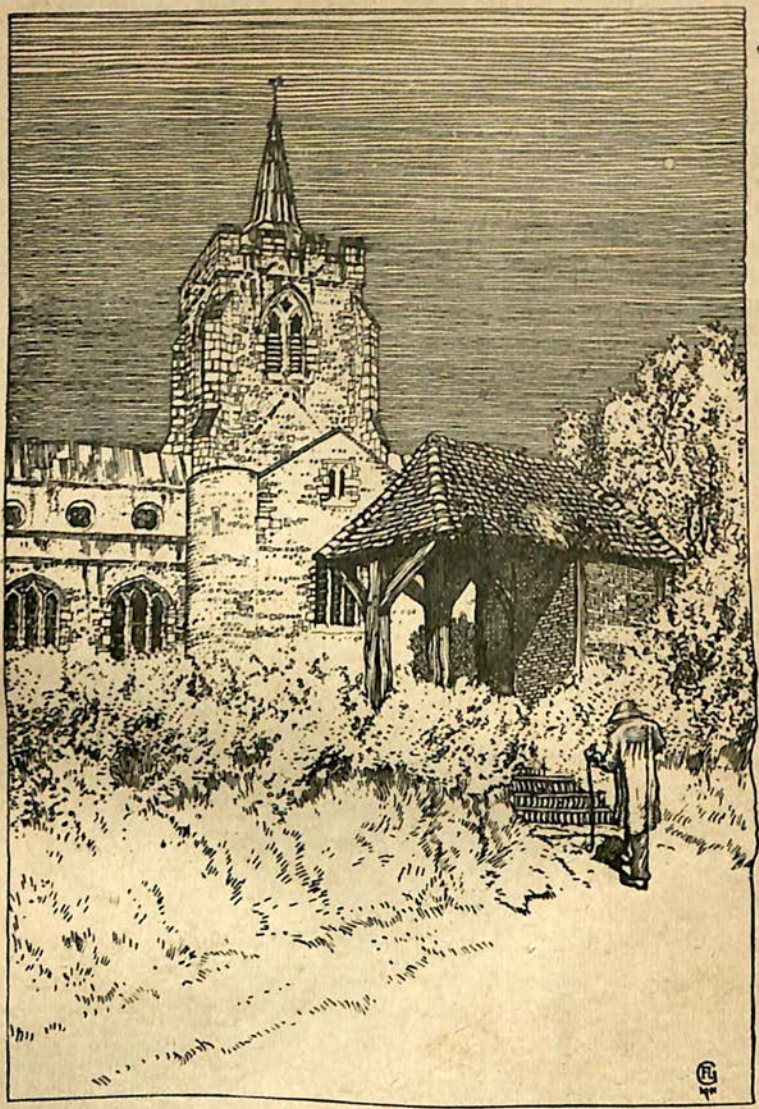

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Sunrise.

HIGHWAYS AND BYWAYS

IN

HERTFORDSHIRE

CHAPTER I

THE RYE HOUSE, AMWELL, WARE, HERTFORD

"We made an excursion together, a few summers since, into Hertfordshire, to beat up the quarters of some of our less known relations in that fine corn country." So wrote the most delightful of essayists, Charles Lamb, and I have loved him as a brother since first reading his praises of pleasant Hertfordshire. Many years spent among highways and byways of that county have left me full of recollections of those sweet itineraries. Other counties have been the theatre of actions fraught with more historic importance, or have given to old England a greater number of illustrious sons; but Hertfordshire has ever been esteemed for the varied character of its scenery; its quiet woodlands, its narrow, winding lanes, its stretches of lush meadow,

its streams that thread their course between gentle alternation of hill and dale. I cannot boast, with *Elia*, that I have cousins sprinkled about in the county; but I have old friends within its borders, and could hardly pass through it in any direction without meeting familiar faces. So I am not loath to put my affairs in order, to weigh the merits of different routes, and to set forth once again to ramble from village to village and from town to town in "hearty, homely, loving Hertfordshire," as Lamb calls it.

Hertfordshire is indeed Lamb's county. Many famous men has it bred, but if it is associated more with one name than another, that name is Charles Lamb. No one loved Hertfordshire better or praised it so sweetly. Although he never actually had his home within its confines, nor was he born there (albeit he once speaks of his "native Hertfordshire"), yet many of his happiest days in childhood were spent in Hertfordshire, with his grandmother, at Blakesware, near Widford; it was close by, at Blenheims, that his first love lived; he had a houseful of cousins near Wheathampstead; and in later life Lamb never tired of walking along Hertfordshire roads and lanes. In a letter to Wordsworth, in 1822, Lamb, when he was forty-six, says: "I had thought in a green old age (Oh, green thought!) to have retired to Ponder's End (emblematic name, how beautiful!) in the Ware Road, there to have made up my accounts with Heaven and the [East India] Company, toddling about between it and Cheshunt; anon stretching, on some fine Izaak Walton morning, to Hoddesdon or Amwell, careless as a beggar; but walking, walking ever till I fairly walked myself off my legs, dying walking!"

Hertfordshire and London were Lamb's two backgrounds: London first, perhaps, but Hertfordshire continually asserting itself. In his earliest prose, *Rosamund Gray*, we have Widford and Blakesware; his earliest poems were written in or of Hertfordshire: and in one of his latest poems, "Going and Gone,"

he returned to Widford again and enumerated his old friends there—Lily the postilion, and Clemitson the innkeeper, and Carter the gardener, and many others not now identifiable. The *Elia* essays "Mackery End in Hertfordshire," "Blakesmoor in H—— shire," and "Dream Children," of which I shall have more to say in their own place later in these pages, contain perhaps the most delicate and delightful writing that the county has inspired. When he and his sister, Mary Lamb, wrote *Mrs. Leicester's School*, they addressed it to the young ladies of Amwell School, and one of the stories, "The Young Mahomedan," contains a charming description, by Mary Lamb, of Blakesware House as she had known it as a child. In the *Elia* essay on "Newspapers" Lamb describes how he and his schoolfellows, fired by the Abyssinian adventures of Bruce, in his exploration of the Nile, traced the source of the new river to Amwell Springs; and one of his most amusing literary hoaxes took the form of some spurious comments (attributed to Ritson, the critic), poking fun at the gentle Scott of Amwell, the Quaker poet. To the end Lamb was true to his adopted county, and one of his last visits away from home was to Widford, to see Mrs. Norris, the widow of his old friend, Randal Norris, and her daughter.

More, Charles Lamb was once actually a landowner in Hertfordshire. A whole acre of Hertfordshire soil belonged to him for some years, until he sold it for fifty pounds. The story, told in the essay *My First Play*, was usually thought to be an Elian invention until Mr. Thomas Greg, the present owner, corroborated it in the pages of *The Athenaeum*. Lamb's cottage, called Button Snap, which is situated near Puckeridge, a mile or so from West Mill on the Buntingford line, now bears a tablet, erected in 1901, commemorating this illustrious ownership.

Every man to his taste. If I seem presently to dwell upon trivial records, I would ask you to remember that no page of such a book as this can be of interest to every reader. Yet I

trust we shall part amicably at the end of our wanderings. If you care little for monkish records or literary associations, you will perhaps follow me with the keener relish into many a tiny hamlet, whose sons, though little known in the larger issues of life, are some of them men of sterling character. If, again, you are indifferent as to where the moorhen has laid her young, and do not watch for the arrival of the swallow or note the first call of the corncrake, you may be the readier to learn of the progress of business in the larger towns, and of the past and present welfare of their inhabitants. So I shall assume that my readers are blest with diversity of tastes, and as I ramble along the highways of Hertfordshire I shall often leave the more frequented thoroughfares to explore byways very far indeed from the madding crowd. I may come across such rustics as are not to be seen at every street-corner, and shall prove a dullard if I fail to gather some wise saws and pithy stories from the patriarchs of the hamlet. Such gossip, lacking the finished phrase of the academic, is none the less of perennial interest to all who are sometimes content to be humble listeners—

> "Where village statesmen *talk* with looks profound
> And news much older than their ale *goes* round."

I am glad to set out upon my rambles while the spring is young, for by so doing I shall be in the western corners of Hertfordshire when the corn is green in the ear, and shall loiter in the agricultural districts of the north when the reapers are busy among the wheat. For the most part, I shall go upon my way on foot and companionless; hoping thus to reap a richer harvest of observation. I am not unmindful of the words of Sterne:—"Let me have a companion of my way, were it but to remark how the shadows lengthen as the sun declines"; but my heartier approval is for Hazlitt:—"One of the pleasantest things in the world is going a journey; but I like to go by myself."

The wind is from the south-west this morning as I stroll into Broxbourne. A fine, drizzling rain has been falling since

Broxbourne Church.

sunrise, and the winding street is utterly deserted. The cock chaffinches, in fine plumage now, are calling "weet, weet," and a skylark over the old mill is circling upwards to his mattins. I saunter down the street as far as the *Bull Inn*, and notice, just opposite, an old house of red brick with a tablet over a doorway:—"*This building is erected at the sole charge of Dame Loetitia Morson relict of Sir William Morson Bart. and was daughter of John Lord Poulett of Hinton St. George in the County of Somersett which Gift is for the Relief and Benefitt of Poor Widows of the Parish of Broxbourne in Hartfordshire in the year of our Lord* 1728." An old man potters out from a doorway and eyes me curiously as I copy this inscription; very possibly he thinks me demented, for who can want a copy of a thing like that? It is too early to gossip, for I have much to see before dark, so I continue my way past a row of plaster-faced cottages with tiny bay windows full of geraniums of erratic growth, and euonymus, glistening with rain-drops, in their two-foot deep "front gardens." I come presently to the first of many milestones I must pass, and note that I am five miles from Ware, five miles from Hertford and sixteen from London. As I enter the High Street of Hoddesdon the wind is somewhat boisterous and the "rooks are blown about the skies"; but the sun has struggled through the cloud-wrack and shines bright upon the *Golden Lion*, who looks down upon me fiercely from his "pride of place" as if resenting the intrusion of a stranger. I pass him fearlessly, as Christian passed the lions before the house Beautiful; but pause at the Brocket Road, where a board upon a small corner house announces that this is the Hoddesdon Liberal and Radical Club Limited. The lamp which projects from the doorway is doubtless emblematic of the light which emanates from within. The Rye House (where you may still see the Great Bed of Ware alluded to by Sir Toby Belch in *Twelfth Night*):—

"Taunt him with the incense of ink: if thou thou'st him some thrice it shall not be amiss; and as many lies as will lie in thy sheet of paper,

although the sheet were big enough for the bed of Ware in England, set 'em down."

is yet two miles beyond me, so I go on my way thinking of the dark schemes which rendered it so famous in the good, or bad, old days, and brought the shadow of death prematurely into many homes.

The story of the *Rye House Plot* is one that lingers in the minds of all students of English History. In the spring of 1683, Charles II. and James, Duke of York, went to see the races at Newmarket. Just opposite to the *Rye House Inn* there stood then a castle, built in the days of Henry VI.; and in that castle lived one Rumbold, formerly an officer in the Parliamentary army. Rumbold and about a score of equally reckless malcontents put their heads together over their tankards, and, so far as can be gathered from many rather contradictory narratives, they formed a plot to delay the Royal party on the return journey from Newmarket to London by placing an overturned cart in the roadway, in order that they might shoot the King and the Duke of York in the confusion. The conspiracy was frustrated, for the Royal party returned earlier than Rumbold had been led to expect, and presently the plot leaked out. The Rye House was searched, incriminating papers were discovered, and the affair culminated in the arrest of those nobler patriots, who, in concert with Argyle, had been planning the overthrow of what they honestly regarded as a corrupt monarchy. Chance had played into the hands of Court favourites, who were not slow in setting about to prove that Rumbold and his miscreant associates of the *Rye House Plot* were secretly in league with the "council of six." In those perilous times, such allegations could have but one ending. Howard of Escrick turned informer: Russell, after vain intercessions made on his behalf by Bedford, Legge, Lady Ranalagh, Rochester, and others, was beheaded in Lincoln's Inn Fields on July 21, 1683, and lies buried in Chenies Church in leafy Buckinghamshire.

Algernon Sidney was condemned to death by the first tribunal presided over by Judge Jeffreys, and, after spending his last hours in writing his *Apology*, was in his turn beheaded on December 7th of the same year, and was buried at Penshurst. Essex, who had been imprisoned in the Tower, was found with his throat cut, and the common folk were much exercised in their minds to decide whether he had been murdered or had committed suicide. Hampden, grandson of a greater grandsire, could only be convicted of misdemeanour, and was fined £40,000. Rumbold is said to have been hanged near the Rye House which he rendered so famous. That "House" was in part demolished nearly 200 years ago, but some fragments of red-brick wall still remain, attached to the present Inn.

Two hundred and fifty years ago, the river Lea, which flows past the Rye House, was much frequented by "a pleasant, hale old man, of a taking personality that won him friends among the learned and cultured of his time"—Izaak Walton. How learned and how cultured those friends were is easily recognised when we remember that he knew Fuller, Donne, Chillingworth, Sanderson, Usher, Ken, Sir Henry Wotton, and many others, men among the most distinguished in their day, though not one of them so famous as the little linendraper whom they honoured with their acquaintance. For the better known of Walton's two books is among the world's classics. As Professor Minto puts it, the old man "hooked a much bigger fish than he angled for when he offered his quaint treatise to the public." I cannot tread these walks beside the Lea without calling him to mind; for probably no writer of eminence—not even Charles Lamb—knew the valley of the Lea, from Waltham Cross to Ware, so intimately as the author of *The Compleat Angler*. Who can forget, indeed, the delightful urbanity of those pages which tell how Piscator stretched his legs up Tottenham Hill "on a fine fresh morning in May," to overtake Venator and Auceps in the hope

that their business also might "occasion them towards Ware," the urbanity above all of his reply to Auceps, the professed falconer, who had heard "many grave men pity anglers"? Who can be hardened against the enthusiasm which leads him to defend his sport from Scriptural precedent? "I shall content myself in telling you that angling is much more ancient than the Incarnation of our Saviour; for in the prophet Amos mention is made of fish-hooks; and in the book of Job, which was long before the days of Amos, for that book is said to be writ by Moses, mention is made also of fish-hooks, which must imply anglers in those times." Those were good days when the best of fishing was free to every man within a walk of Cheapside. But though Walton must have taken what he would call great store of fishes from the waters of the Lea, he was in no way indifferent to other recreations. He dearly loved a country song—*Philida flouts me*, *As at noon Dulcina rested*, or *Johnny Armstrong*—from the lips of a handsome maiden, and an honest ale-house where he could drink his morning draught. He loved, moreover, as we may learn from *The Compleat Angler*, a clean room with lavender in the windows and a score of ballads stuck about the walls; to such an inn he would retire with his trout or chub and request his hostess—"cleanly, handsome, and civil"—to dress it for his dinner. I can never open his book without seeing its author as he appears, with two rings upon his left hand, in Slous's portrait prefixed to Zouch's edition of *Walton's Lives*—those five admirable though brief biographies which inspired the well-known sonnet by Wordsworth. His kindly nature was shown in his will, for he left money to apprentice two boys yearly, a sum to be given to a maid-servant or other "honest, poor man's daughter" of twenty-one years of age upon her marriage, and a sum to buy coals for needy folk in his native town of Stafford. But though Stafford claims his birthplace, and Fleet Street disputes with Winchester the honour of his tomb, his memory is above

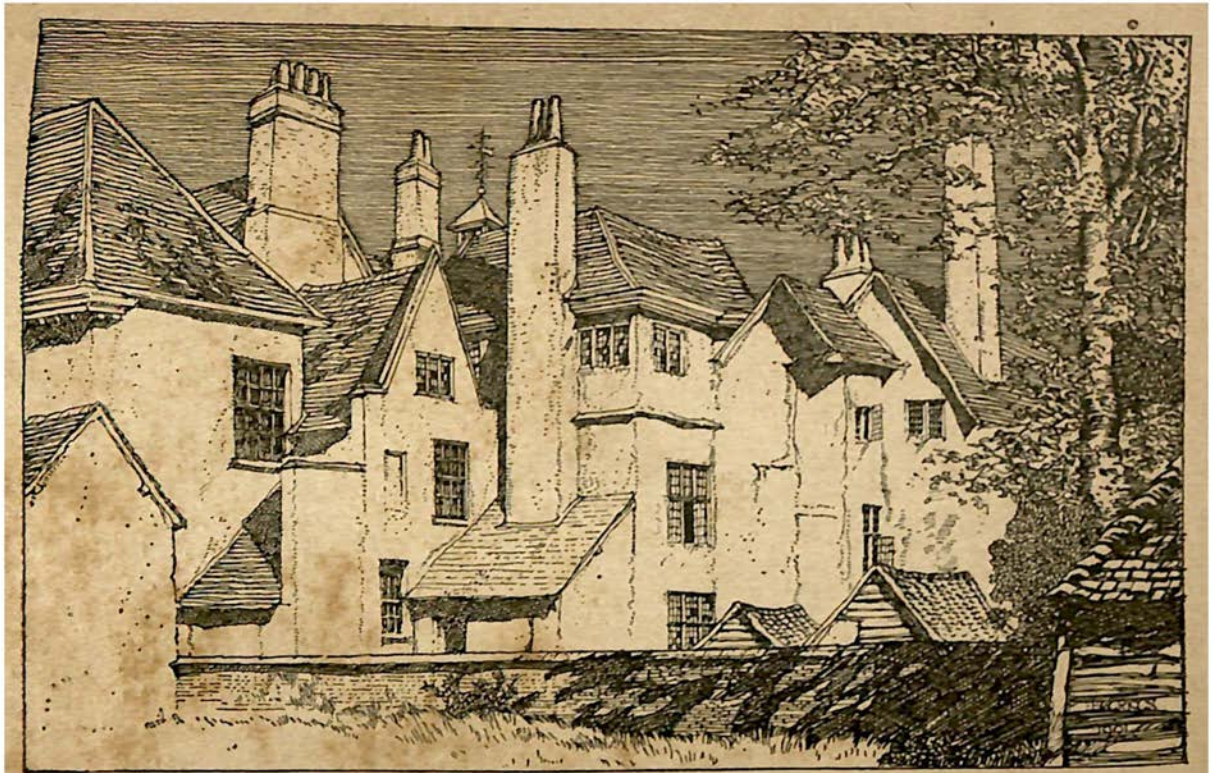
all linked with Hertfordshire, for in Hertfordshire he followed the art that inspired him. Nor does he stand alone: the county is rich in classics of the angle, for, as we shall see, Dame Juliana Berners, who wrote the first treatise on the art of fishing was the prioress of Sopwell Nunnery.

With the pretty village of Amwell is associated the name of John Scott, the Quaker poet. Amwell stands upon a wooded slope not three miles distant from the Rye House. If you approach the village from Amwell Street at the north end of Hoddesdon, you climb a hill on the Ware road until you are within a stone-cast of the *Waggon and Horses Inn.* Here, passing through a gate upon your right, you come presently to a flint wall overhung with gorse; then, turning a corner, you see close at hand the small, ivy-clad church of St. John the Baptist, so suggestive of literary and historic reminiscences. A flag floats from the church tower this afternoon, for it is Palm Sunday, and the clergyman at Amwell does everything decently and in order. I pass round the church and notice an old brick mausoleum, erected to perpetuate, on tablets placed outside the walls, the virtues of many who bore the name of Mylne. From one inscription I learn that Robert Mylne was a lineal descendant of John Mylne, who was Master Mason to King James the Third of Scotland, and he it was who "designed and constructed the magnificent bridge of Blackfriars, London," and had once "the superintendence of the Cathedral Church of St. Paul." He was buried near the resting place of Sir Christopher Wren in the vaults of the Cathedral. Mattins being over, I enter the church, which will perhaps seat one hundred persons. On the wall behind the reading-desk is a quaint brass, representing a monk with his finger-tips together in an attitude of prayer. The figure suggests little as to its approximate age or import, but some writing on a card placed beneath supplies the deficiency. "*This brass was laid down in the chancel of the church circa A.D.* 1400, *to the memory of a priest.*"

But it was the memory of "Scott of Amwell" that drew me here to-day, and it is of him that I think as I cross the little bridge over the New River, and turn to look back upon the church, nestled so snugly among the trees as to be almost hidden from sight. There is an islet close to the bridge, and there, on a stone, are some lines commencing "Amwell! perpetual be thy stream," written by the Quaker poet. He was born in Grange Walk, Bermondsey, on 9th January, 1730; his acquaintance with Amwell began when his father removed to this village in 1740. Twenty years later he was known to John Hoole, and to Dr. Johnson, who visited him here. It seems to have been his first wife, Sarah Frogley, whom he married in 1767, who awoke in him a love for poetry; he wrote an elegy to her memory when, in 1769, she died with her child. Scott died on 12th December, 1783, at Ratcliffe. Contributions from his pen appeared between 1753 and 1758 in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, and it was in the pages of the same periodical that he subsequently defended another of his friends, Dr. Beattie. His descriptive poem entitled "Amwell," first published in 1776, is, like the rest of his poetical works, now read about as often as the *King Arthur* of Blackmore, or *La Pucelle d'Orléans* of Chapelain; but the curious may find it among his other verses in Chalmers's Collection of English Poetry, which Thoreau attempted to read without skipping. Amwell must have seemed an ideal retreat to a man of Scott's temperament. It is only twenty miles from London, but it might have inspired that phrase of Tennyson's, "a haunt of ancient peace." The Quaker bard doubtless strove earnestly to impart something of its old world fragrance and tranquillity to the pages of his poem, but his inclination was greater than his ability. As Canon Ainger has remarked: "Scott could not have made Amwell famous, as Cowper made Olney, or John Dyer made Grongar Hill. It is Amwell, rather, that has embalmed the name of the gentle Quaker." Possibly it is but idle surmise on my part, but I have always fancied that Scott

of Amwell had many traits of character in common with the Quaker created by a greater Scott—Joshua Geddes of Mount Sharon, who, according to the testimony of his sister Rachel, corresponded "with our friend John Scott of Amwell." Dr. Johnson promised to write a life of his friend, but the task was unaccomplished when, at the bidding of death, he rested from his many labours. The sketch prefixed to Scott's *Essays*, published in 1785, is from the pen of John Hoole, the translator of Tasso.

There is an entry in the parish register at Amwell which I cannot pass over without one word of comment. That entry records how "*Master William Warner, a man of good yeares and of honest reputation; by profession an attornye of the common pleas, author of 'Albion's England,' diynge suddenly in the night in his bedde without any former complaynt of sicknesse on Thursday night beinge the 9th daye of March* (1608–9) *was buried the Saturday following and lyeth in the church at the corner under the stone to Walter Ffader.*" This William Warner was noteworthy in his day and generation; born about 1558, he was educated at Magdalen College, Oxford, and was subsequently, in London, a friend of Drayton and many other writers. As we pry into these corners of literary history our chief thought is that men must make a great stir indeed to be long remembered. I have somewhere read that Warner was numbered among the associates of Shakespeare and Ben Jonson; his writings were known to Southey and to Lamb, but who now reads *Albion's England*? The same question may be asked touching the writings of Isaac Reed, who also lies in the churchyard of Amwell, under a 'canting' inscription which reminds the passer that, *Read* as he may, he must die at last. Reed edited Shakespeare and the *Old Plays* of Dodsley; he collected an extensive and curious library in his rooms at Staple Inn, and when Johnson was busy with the *Lives of the most eminent English Poets* he was often supplied with data by this indefatigable scholar. Reed died on 5th January, 1897, at Staple Inn, and



Stansteadbury House.

when, in 1837, his library was sold in London, it realised £4,386 19*s.* 6*d.*

The country around Amwell is pleasant to the eye, and I linger in the little village, where the old stocks may still be seen, loath to quit a spot so full of interest. Moreover, although so near the great metropolis, the ornithological records of Amwell and its neighbourhood are far from meagre. In the year 1881 the nest of a golden oriole with three eggs was found in this parish; three great spotted woodpeckers were once shot in the month of January near Hertford and a few young woodcocks were seen, in June, 1885, on Hertford Heath. Mr. Benningfield, of Ware, shot six black terns some years ago near Broxbourne, and the tufted duck has been observed several times on the Lynch Lake at Hoddesdon. Flocks of golden plovers were once noticed in the month of March near Hertford and a common guillemot has been shot on the Hertford Meads. About forty Pallas' sand grouse were seen at Jepp's Farm, near Hoddesdon, on the 20th of May, 1888. Such birds were, of course, mere chance visitors; but these records which I have preserved may encourage some ornithologist to keep his eyes open when abroad in this corner of Hertfordshire. As I stand in the churchyard at Amwell this morning the larks are singing volubly in the high heavens; a wren, too, somewhere down by the New River, is busy with his rollicking ditty, and a great titmouse is filing his saw persistently on a distant tree. I hope to be many miles from Amwell when the voices of migrant songsters are heard in our land.

On a bright, breezy day at the end of March, I approach Ware by the highway along which John Gilpin rode when he went farther than he intended.

> "At Edmonton his loving wife
> From the balcony spied
> Her tender husband, wondering much
> To see how he did ride.

"Stop, stop, John Gilpin!—Here's the house—
They all at once did cry;
The dinner waits, and we are tired;
Said Gilpin,—So am I!

"But yet his horse was not a whit
Inclined to tarry there;
For why?—his owner had a house
Full ten miles off, at Ware."

And to Ware John Gilpin's horse carried him, minus his hat and wig. How he objected to dine here upon his "wedding day" whilst his wife was dining at Edmonton, and how his return was as remarkable as his outward ride we all learnt in the nursery, and I might spare the hackneyed quotation, did not the signboard of *The Johnny Gilpin* catch my eye as I enter the town, travelling in the track of another "citizen of credit and renown." This was Mr. Samuel Pepys, who came to Ware on 9th October, 1662, riding on a grey horse, on his way to Puckeridge, a few miles farther on. He had ridden from Ware to Puckeridge on a former occasion and had found the roads to be "exceedingly bad." Bad they doubtless were, and long remained so; but the main roads of Hertfordshire are now excellently cared for, and the cyclist riding northward from London need not grumble after he has mounted the hills that lead him to Elstree, Barnet, or London Colney.

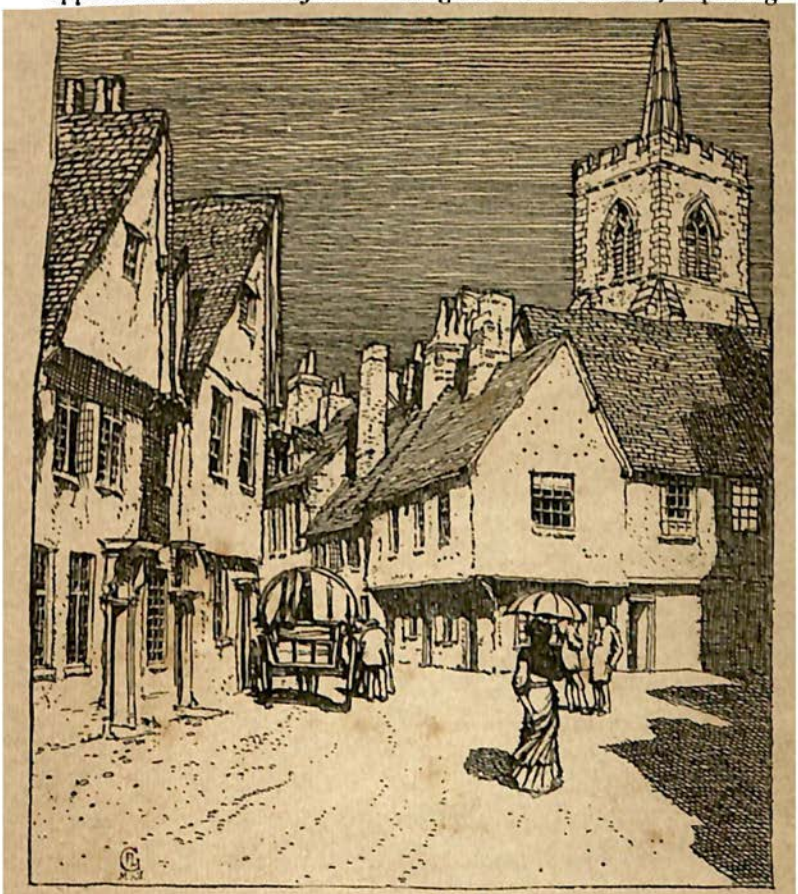
The road where it enters the town commands a good view of Ware, still, I believe, the centre of the malting industry in Hertfordshire. The many cowls over the drying kilns are conspicuous for several miles from the town, and may remind you that Hertfordshire is one of the four counties whose soil is specially suitable to the growth of malting grain. Ware owes its market grant to King Henry III., who, in 1254, gave this privilege to Robert de Quincy, granting at the same time license to hold a fair. If for nothing else, the town should be famous for its vicissitudes of fortune. The Domesday Book shows that at the time of "the great survey" Ware was the

property of Hugh de Grentemaisnil, and boasted 130 inhabitants; subsequently, Saier de Quincy, Robert de Quincy, Warwick the King-maker, the Countess of Richmond, mother to Henry VII., Margaret Plantagenet, Henry VIII., Catherine Countess of Huntingdon, and Thomas Fanshawe were among its owners. In 1700 the manor was purchased by Sir Thomas Byde, and the property remained in his family for nearly one hundred and fifty years.

I can see nothing suggestive of the antiquity of the town as I pass up the High Street; nor are such names as Halfhide, Harradence, or Stallabrass likely to assist the literary memory to give up its dead. But the lamp above the little passage leading to the Independent Chapel reminds me that William Godwin, the author of that once famous treatise on *Political Justice*, of *Caleb Williams*, and other books, used to preach here for the Independents; and it is of the many references to Godwin in the letters of Charles Lamb that I think as I retrace my steps towards the bridge near the *Barge Inn*. William was the best man among his brethren, some of whom disgraced the family name; Mrs. Godwin, a strict Calvinist, was wont to lament that she had given birth to so many sons destined to everlasting damnation.

Talfourd, who thought Godwin one of the most remarkable persons of his time, tells a characteristic story, which I must give in his own words. "The first meeting between Lamb and Godwin did not wear a promising aspect. Lamb grew warm as the conviviality of the evening advanced, and indulged in some freaks of humour which had not been dreamed of in Godwin's philosophy; and the philosopher, forgetting the equanimity with which he usually looked on the vicissitudes of the world or the whist-table, broke into an allusion to Gilray's caricature, and asked, 'Pray, Mr. Lamb, are you toad or frog?' Coleridge was apprehensive of a rupture; but calling the next morning on Lamb, he found Godwin seated at breakfast with him; and an interchange of

civilities and card parties was established, which lasted through the life of Lamb." Gilray's caricature, I should explain, had appeared in the *Anti-Jacobin Magazine and Review*, depicting



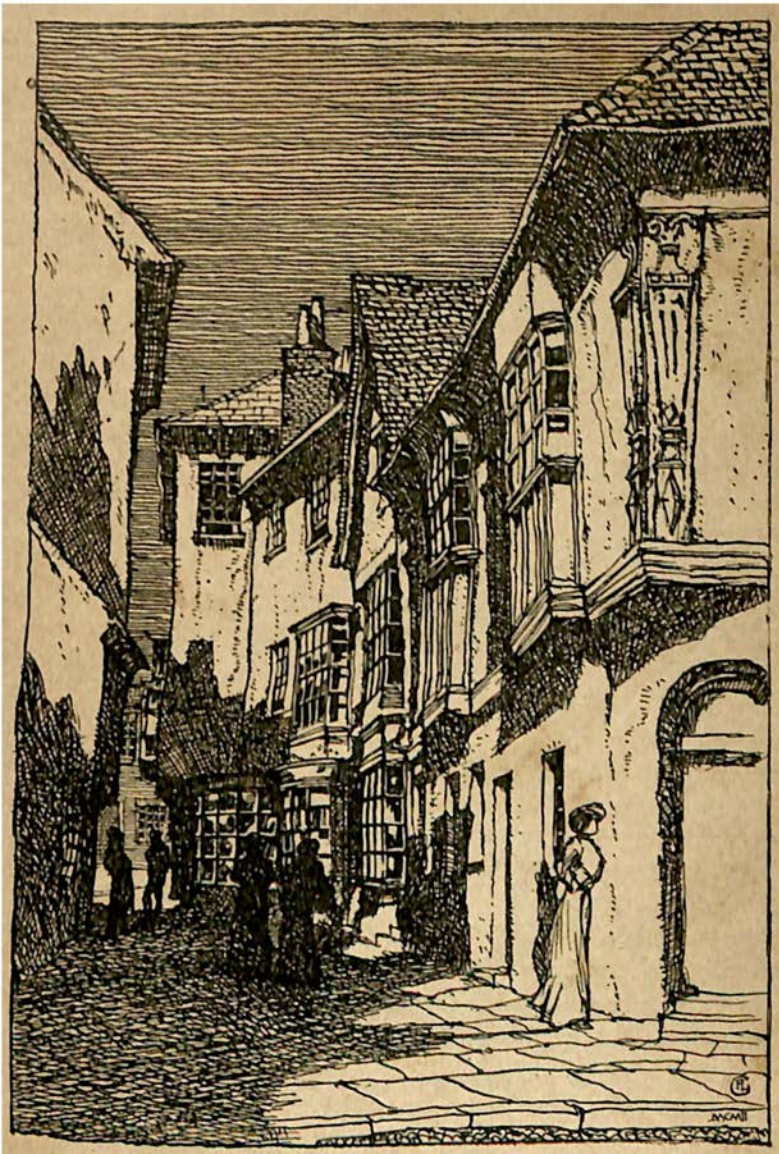
West Street, Ware.

Charles Lamb and Charles Lloyd as a toad and a frog, seated side by side reading their own *Blank Verse*, which had just been published. Coleridge, Southey, and all the other followers of Lepaux, as the anti-Jacobins liked to think them, were

there too. In a letter written in 1800 Lamb mentions how Godwin spent an evening with him at Chapel Street, Pentonville, how friendly he was, and how they sat till midnight drinking punch and talking of Coleridge. Fifteen years later he wrote (as a joke), "Poor Godwin! I was passing his tomb the other day in Cripplegate Churchyard . . . his systems and his theories are ten feet deep in Cripplegate mould." Godwin, as a matter of fact, survived until 1836, two years after Lamb's death. I question a few old folk in Ware, hoping their grandsires may have talked of the Independent Minister, but my quest is vain: one is sure no such man was ever talked of in the town, one "thought 'e 'ad 'eard the name." Perhaps I was expecting too much, for Godwin laid down his ministry as long ago as 1779. So I dismiss the philosopher from my mind and idle away an hour watching the white ducks diving beside the barges on the Lea, sauntering by the riverside where the frogs are croaking persistently, and chatting with the anglers, who tell me they have caught nothing up to standard measurement.

I have been trying to realise how ancient is this town, but the serenity of the afternoon and the trend of my cogitations are alike marred by the many noisy boys upon the towing path. I should like to learn something about William of Ware, once teacher to that staunch maintainer of Realism, Duns Scotus; to spend an hour in the old church of St. Mary, where is a font dating back to the days of Henry IV., and to see the Priory, once inhabited by Franciscan monks; but my time is short, and I must set my face towards Hertford —the capital, but not the largest or most interesting town in the county.

An old, old town; a town whose story stretches back to days when as yet Domesday Book was not; a town whose name is mentioned by Bede, who writes of it as *Herudsford*, *i.e.*, the red ford. I fancy, however, that most travellers visiting Hertford for the first time would suppose it much less



Honey Lane, Hertford.

ancient than Ware. You may follow the course of the Lea from the bridge at Ware, and meet with little by the way worthy of attention, unless you are interested in the making of bricks, an industry extensively carried on in the neighbourhood. Or you may remember a paragraph in Carlyle: "Monday . . . is the day of the mutinous rendezvous in Corkbush Field, between Hertford and Ware; where Cromwell and the general officers had to front the Levelling Principle, in a most dangerous manner and trample it out or be trampled out by it on the spot. Eleven mutineers are ordered from the ranks; tried by court-martial on the field; three of them condemned to be shot; throw dice for their life, and one *is* shot, there and then. The name of him is Arnald, long memorable among the Levellers."

Seen at the distance of a mile, and from the river side, Hertford is not an imposing town; but as you loiter in *Bull Plain*, or *The Walk*, or *Old Cross*, you notice that it is at least a busy one; and, if you get into conversation with a "real Hertford man" it will not take you long to discover that he thinks Hertford worthy of its proud pre-eminence as county town. He will tell you, too, that portions of the old castle are still standing, and that the judge lives in the "house" when he is "in these parts." Moreover, he will probably describe, in graphic language, how, when the clock was being taken down a few years ago from the old Town Hall, the pulleys broke, and a man was flung across the street "almost on to the roof of the opposite house." To these and other matters I give respectful attention for a while, as becomes a seeker for knowledge; but presently resume my own investigations, and come to a fountain in the wall with an interesting inscription: "*These fragments of the old Church of St. Mary the Great* (*built about A.D.* 1210, *destroyed before* 1552) *were found in* 1888 *on the site of the Public Library.*" I find on inquiry that when the foundations for this library were being dug out a number of skeletons were unearthed; they were removed to the graveyard

of St. Andrew's Church and there again buried. And so, one thing suggesting another, I turn to visit this graveyard. I find it small, and not particularly interesting; but stay to copy a curious epitaph. Not one headstone in ten is ever restored, and the day may come when some historian will thank me for my diligence. Close to the iron railings that skirt the narrow pathway is a stone upon which is written: "*To the memory of Mr. William Hart. He died on March* 19, 1823, *aged* 66 *years.*" Underneath is the following verse:—

> "Blow Boreas blow, let Neptune's billows roar;
> Here lies a sailor safe landed on the shore;
> Though Neptune's waves have tossed him to and fro
> By God's decree he harbours here below;
> He now at anchor lies amid the fleet
> Awaiting orders Admiral Christ to meet."

I find, as I resume my rambles, that the Quakers have a meeting house in this town, where meetings for worship are "helden" on Sundays and Wednesdays, which are free to all, and the notice serves to remind me that a brother of Scott of Amwell, who nourished his soul upon Law's *Serious Call*, was once a Quaker minister in Hertford.

A biographical dictionary of the many inhabitants of Hertford Castle would not perhaps be wholly edifying; but it would at least serve to show that the once massive structure sheltered from time to time all sorts and conditions of men. It was erected about 905 by Edward the Elder, when he built, or rebuilt, "the town of Hertford on either side Lee." William the Conqueror gave both town and castle into the remarkably safe keeping of Peter de Valoignes. Days of turmoil followed, and the barons, under the leadership of the Dauphin of France, Louis, son of Philip Augustus, wrested Hertford Castle from King John. In the reign of King Edward III. it was put to distinguished uses, for John II. of France and David of Scotland were imprisoned in this Castle at the pleasure of his Plantagenet Majesty. Coming to modern times, we remember

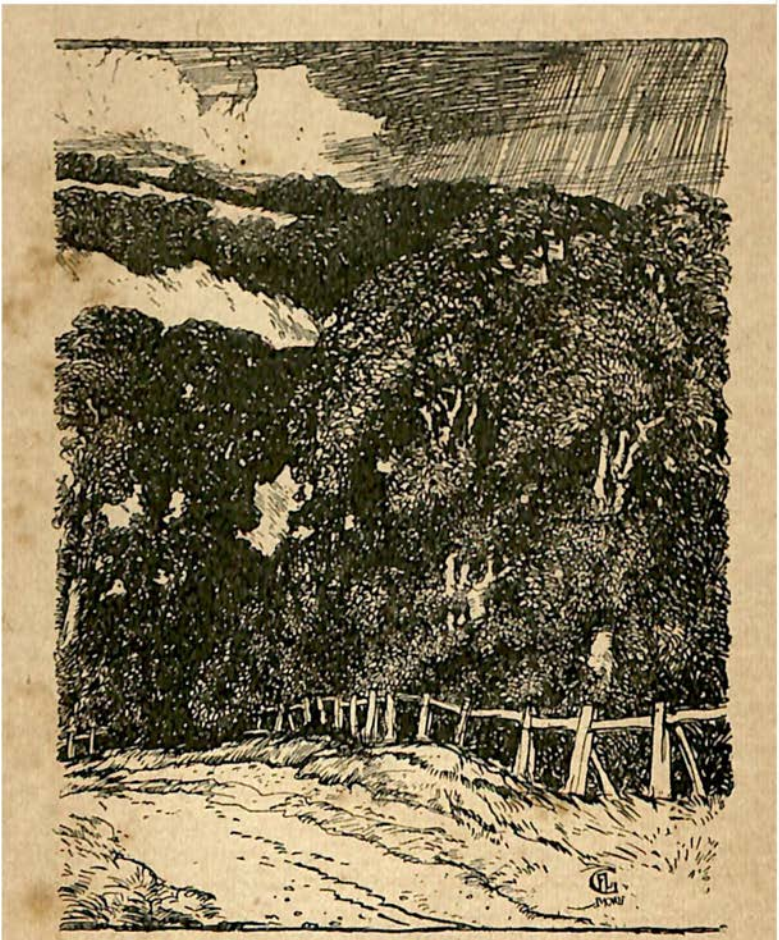
Sir William Cowper, who, residing at Hertford Castle, was beloved for his "hospitality, charity, and other Christian virtues; often visiting his poor neighbours and relieving them in private, according to their necessities." In earlier days, when residing at Ratling Court, he had written the epitaph for the monument which he erected to the memory of Richard Hooker in Bishopsbourne Church. Sir William had many descendants, and one of them famous—the author of *The Task*.

Later in the evening, when the thrushes are in full song, I stroll down the long avenue of chestnuts in the cemetery of All Saints' Church. James Hervey should have known this spot; he could have found inspiration here for another chapter to his *Meditations among the Tombs*. The crocuses upon the graves are dead, but daffodils and primroses are mingled with patches of pinks whose blooms are yet to come. The old church was burnt out a few years ago and the new building is not yet completed. Some colours carried by the Hertfordshire Regiment through the Crimean War were destroyed in the flames. A quartermaster of that regiment, one Thomas Panton, was buried in the churchyard in 1794. There are many quaint epitaphs and verses of uncouth structure on every side. Close to the church is a headstone with these words: "*Here lies the body of Sarah Young wife of James Young of West Street dyed Sept.* 8, 1749 *aged* 66. *She Was a Pious Christian and* 38 *Years so Kind And Loving A Wife as Never Gave her Husband An Angry word.*" I pass towards the higher ground at the extreme end of the churchyard and get into conversation with an old man who is evidently an authority on all local matters. He seems to know the story of every grave, and, as he steps from one to the other he repeats those stories for my edification, in brief but pregnant sentences. "This'n was put up in memory of a baby who was drownded in the Indian Ocean . . . . this'n shot 'isself . . . . 'ere's one as cut 'is own throat . . . . this stone was put up by the parints of a baby wot 'ad the wrong

medsum give it an' never woke . . . . I tell yer, there's a sight of rum uns up here; I know more about 'em than most chaps. 'Ere's one as fell down his stairkiss, an' 'ere's another wot 'anged 'isself . . . . fact is there ain't room to put 'em . . . . Ah! now, this'n nigh the path was a fightin' man; when anythink was on 'ereabouts he dressed 'isself up that fine an' covered 'isself with medals an' things so as you'd a took 'im for a gen'ral." What a theme for Hamlet!

I cannot leave this fine old town without remembering how, in the year 673, Theodore, seventh Archbishop of Canterbury, summoned the first council of the English Church to meet at Hertford. The acts of the council are preserved by Bede, and we know that in addition to many other learned men, there were present four 'Suffragans'—Bise, Putta, Lothere and Winfrith. The worthy archbishop produced ten canons, founded on those approved by the *Council of Chalcedon* and translated by Dionysius Exiguus: these canons were in the main accepted, written down by a "notary," and signed by the bishops present at the council. Nor can I forget how the Danes troubled Hertford more than a century later. Alfred the Great, who, when he was neither reading nor directing some industry, was being pursued by the Danes or chasing them, was much harassed by those predatory adventurers when "they came to the East Angles as far as Essex, where they seized on a small island called Merisig." In the words of Milton, whose *History of Britain* is now seldom consulted, "they who possessed Merisig, intending to winter thereabout, drew up their ships, some into the Thames, others into the river Lee, and on the bank thereof built a castle twenty miles from London; to assault which the Londoners aided with other forces marched out the summer following, but were soon put to flight, losing four of the King's captains. The King thereupon with his forces lay encamped nearer the city, that the Danes might not infest them in time of harvest; in the meantime subtilely devising to turn Lee stream several ways, whereby the Danish

bottoms were left on dry ground." As I look round upon Hertford in the gathering gloom, I can fancy I am back in the twilight of English history, and can see those Danish ships settling down slowly upon the ooze of the diverted Lee, a thousand years ago.



Gilston Elms.

The Maran Valley from the Viaduct.

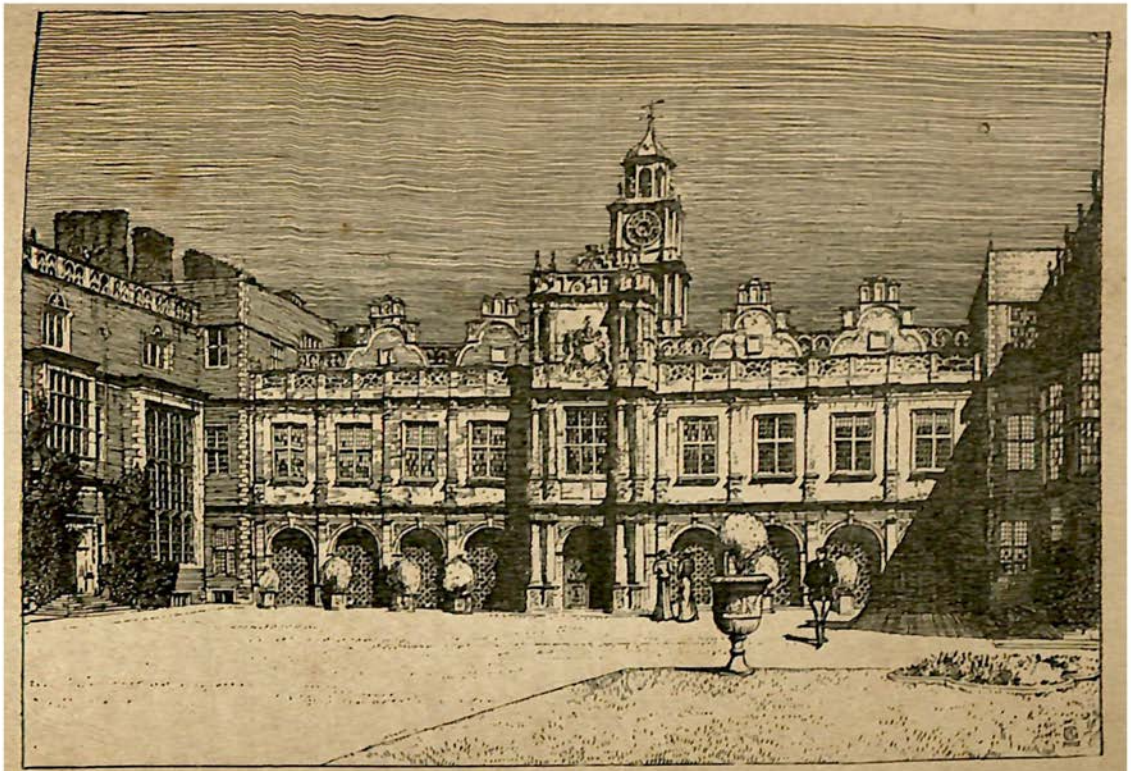
CHAPTER II

HATFIELD, WELWYN, WHEATHAMPSTEAD

SIR ROBERT CECIL, a younger son of that great Lord Burleigh who alone of all his peers sat in the presence of Queen Elizabeth and received homage from the "haughty heirs of the Fitzalans and the De Veres," was a remarkably astute gentleman. Very soon after the body of Elizabeth had been taken in the royal barge to Whitehall, where it lay in state awaiting interment in Westminster Abbey, that wiseacre, James the First of England, arrived from the north at the royal manor of Hatfield, *en route* for London. Here he had an interview with Sir Robert Cecil. Monarch and subject seem to have got on well together and to have parted amicably. The day soon came for James to reward those who had facilitated his peaceful accession; we read that three hundred knights were nominated in one day, and Cecil became Earl of Salisbury. Now it came to pass that King James, taking a great fancy to Lord Salisbury's house at Theobalds, near Cheshunt (the house where Auceps parted company from Piscator and

Venator, and where a few years ago Temple Bar was set up on its removal from Fleet Street), offered to exchange for it the royal manor of Hatfield. The Earl, as one of his biographers says, "could hardly refuse." He never lived in his new domain, but planned and built upon it a splendid mansion under the guidance and advice of the architect Limminge—who afterwards built Blickling, in Norfolk—and left to his heirs the magnificent Jacobean home much as it stands to-day—with debts amounting to £38,000.

The huge but beautiful iron gateways before the grand drive to Hatfield House, the home of the "courtly Cecils," are the objects that first meet the eye as you pass from the railway station of the quiet little Hertfordshire town. Hatfield House stands upon the site once occupied by the palace of the bishops of Ely, King Edgar having bestowed the manor upon their Abbey of St. Etheldreda, and those who remember this fact will probably also recollect that the second synod of the English Church met at Hatfield. If Hatfield is indeed the Heathfield of the antiquarian, and if, as Max Müller tells us, men who dwell on the heath are *heathen*, a strangely inappropriate honour was bestowed on the town when, on 17th September, 680, Theodore, first Primate of all England, met this council here, seven years after the Council of Hertford. John the Precentor, a man learned in church music and ritual, whom Benedict Biscop had recently induced to enter the monastery at Wearmouth, was among the many distinguished persons present at this synod. He took a conspicuous share in the deliberations of the assembly, and laid before the bishops the canons of the Lateran Council of 649. In return for such good offices he was entrusted with a copy of the acts of the Synod of Hatfield, which he promised to hand to Pope Agatho. John, however, died whilst on his way to Rome. Some important declarations were framed by this early Hertfordshire Council, and we are assured by ecclesiastical historians that the Church of England has enjoyed more



Hatfield House: the South Front.

complete organisation and continuity since the holding of its famous second synod in the town where I am writing and musing to-day.

The parish church of St. Etheldreda was originally founded in Norman times, and, like so many churches in this England of ours, is full of interest to historian and antiquarian alike. Easter is hardly over yet, and the whole nave is fragrant with odorous arum and hyacinth placed lavishly around font and pulpit, and on chancel steps. I notice a tablet to the memory of Samuel Bulkeley, once a Prebendary of Bristol, and one to Thomas Fuller, D.D., for more than twenty-seven years rector of this church, who died in 1712. Far more imposing is the tomb of Sir Robert Cecil, occupying the space on the left of the chancel between the choir and the outer wall. Tall, iron railings surround the whole; four life-size female figures in marble support, on bended knee, a large slab upon which lies the figure of Sir Robert, a wide ruff round his neck and a wand in his hand. In his day and generation he was a statesman hardly less conspicuous than his father before him. He was Secretary of State under Walsingham, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, Lord Privy Seal, Master of the Court of Wards, and Lord High Treasurer of England. He laboured assiduously to place his country's finances on a secure basis, caused an additional duty to be placed on imports, and attempted to augment the income of his extravagant monarch by the sum of £200,000—which, however, the Commons refused to vote. He seems to have entertained unkindly feelings toward his cousin, Francis Bacon, and towards Sir Walter Raleigh, but beside his monument I will forget his animosities, as completely as most people have forgotten his writings, *A Treatise against the Papists* and *The State and Dignity of a Secretary of State.* On the other side of the church, near the organ, is the tomb of Sir John Brockett, who died in 1599, and whose name survives in that of the fine old county seat, Brocket Hall, close by, where

Lord Palmerston expired in 1865. The helmet of Sir John Brockett is suspended from the church wall just above his tomb.

But churches and tombs and tablets are not the sole objects of interest in this world, especially when the heart is young and the year is in its spring; so I am glad to pass out of the gates into the fresh air, and to look once again, after many days, upon the fine old palace on the hill-top. That palace is now used for stables; horses chew their oats and paw the ground where ecclesiastics once meditated; where in 1336 Philippa of Hainault, the heroine of Neville's Cross and Queen of Edward III., bore William Hatfield; where Henry VII. visited; where Edward VI. lived; and where the proud Princess Elizabeth, presently to be mistress of a proud race, fretted and sulked by turns under her captivity. Yet even the stables have their link with history. Some words upon the wall facing the south-west have touched the hearts of many: "The last charger of Arthur Duke of Wellington (descended from his Waterloo charger Copenhagen) was presented by the 2nd Duke to Mary Marchioness of Salisbury Nov. 18, 1852, and was buried near this spot Feby. 24, 1861."

Hatfield House itself is a fine specimen of early Jacobean architecture, built of brick and stone, wonderfully softened and harmonised by the hand of Time. A basement-arcade stretches from wing to wing, supported on Doric pilasters. The grand entrance porch is in the central tower, the third story of which displays the armorial bearings of the Earl of Salisbury. High above all, conspicuous from many spots in the park, are the clock-turret and cupola. Angle turrets project from each wing, with oriel windows and cupola roofs. Viewed from either the quadrangle or the north terrace, the whole structure is noble—so spacious, so cunningly conceived, so lavishly adorned that it would surely have delighted the eyes of Elizabeth could she

have looked upon it on that morning when she set out for London,

> "With many a gallant gentleman
> And banners waved before."

You may still see the oak under which, as the story runs, Elizabeth was sitting when news reached Hatfield that she was Queen at last; you may see in the library the hat which she wore at the time. But visitors must carefully bear in mind that the old palace and not the present house is chiefly associated with memories of Elizabeth.

The Palace of Hatfield, as such, is a thing of the past; it is the house which monopolises attention. The marble hall, with its ceiling of painted panels and walls of oaken wainscot, covered with tapestry; the grand staircase, hung with portraits by Lely, Kneller, Zucchero, and other masters; the long gallery (163 feet), adorned with antique furniture, choice old pictures and coats of mail; King James's room, flooded with light from its oriel windows, and embellished with all that the wit of carver or gilder could devise; the dining-room, overlooked by the marble bust of Burleigh; the armoury, with its relics of the great Armada; the chapel, with its Flemish window and marble altar-piece; the many bedrooms where you may notice, if you notice little else, the richly carved Jacobean wardrobes—these are but a few of the prominent features of interest shown to visitors when their owner is from home.

Samuel Pepys and John Evelyn came here—admirers both—and the former wrote that on one occasion he was followed about the house by a pretty dog which he "would fain have stolen." He thought the gardens the fairest he had ever seen, and was pleased with the gooseberries which he saw upon the bushes "as big as nutmegs." Horticultural art has ripened since Pepys was here, and fruit as large now grows in many a cottage garden. He saw far rarer things in the library, things so rare that their like was to be found in no other home. Those treasures are here still. Here are the *State Papers* of

many Cecils, the *Diary* of Lord Burleigh, documents concerning the divorce of Anne of Cleves, early MSS. of the *Chronicles* of Malmesbury and Hovenden, a MS. translation of *The Pilgrimage of the Soul*, once the property of Henry VI., the *Council Book* of Mary Tudor, the *Casket* and *Norfolk Letters* touching the mystery of Mary Stuart, about thirteen thousand autograph letters penned during many reigns, and an emblazoned pedigree of Elizabeth, a marvel of genealogical ingenuity, which traces her descent from Adam!

But the beautiful surroundings of the splendid homestead so long inhabited by the Cecils are so pleasing to the eye that, instead of spending hours in passing from room to room and making a catalogue of curiosities which have been described a hundred times, I saunter for an hour up and down the broad terrace before the north front, looking away over the expanse of Hatfield Park that lies spread before me, covered here and there with stretches of dead bracken, and shaded by innumerable oaks. Masses of varied and evergreen foliage meet my eye as I walk from the house towards the great entrance gates which I have already mentioned. Aucuba shows brightly between cupressus and berberis; holly is overshadowed by larch and fir; chestnut, pine and beech are conspicuous by the contrast they present. The path sweeps round to the left, and I find myself standing upon the viaduct near the gates and looking down upon Hatfield stretched out below and beyond. Beneath me is the winding street which joins the road to Mill Green; on my right, just opposite *The Jacob's Well*, one of the narrowest alleys I can call to mind is overshadowed by quaint old cottages of erratic structure; beyond, at the foot of the hill which leads to palace and church, stands the *Eight Bells*, the threads of greyish smoke from its chimneys rising almost perpendicularly; and over everything is the quietness of eve.

Before Hatfield is quite awake this morning I pass out of the town and follow the road by the old stone wall that skirts the park on the northern side. The sun shines brightly between

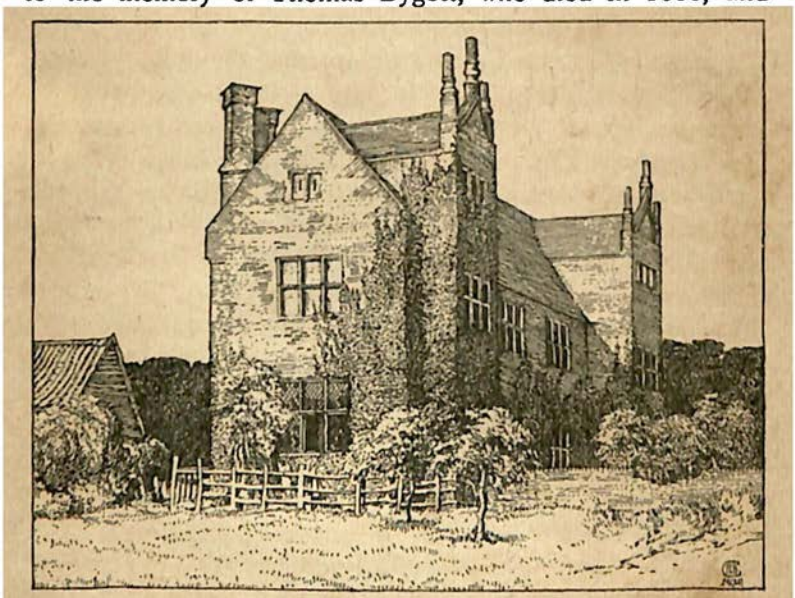
branches of leafless oak and elm; labourers are digging gravel from the side of a wooded ridge, and carts piled high with yellow straw are approaching in the distance. Presently the woods wear a wilder aspect; pine, larch and fir stand shoulder to shoulder on the slopes and a denser undergrowth affords more perfect seclusion "where the wren warbles." I hear the thin, sharp note of the creeper, busy upon the beech boles, but seldom see him at work, so careful is he to keep the tree between his tiny body and the road. Some pheasants are standing among the dead bracken, warming their splendid plumage in the sun, and a company of blue titmice flit restlessly from larch to larch near the rustic bridge at Mill Green. Here, at the parting of the ways, I pause to admire the garden of *The Old Crooked Billet*, where box-edged beds are bright with daffodils and primroses. I must take the road for Tewin, but am loath to leave this pretty hamlet, with its row of *Waterside Cottages*, their red-tiled roofs covered thickly with lichens and yellow jessamine upon their walls. A magpie is watching me from his large wicker cage, and is inclined to be communicative; the rich, joyous voice of the skylark floats downward crisply from the cloudless blue; the gabble of geese in the distance comes faintly upon the breeze from the neighbourhood of Hatfield Hyde. The honeysuckle in the hedges is fast puting forth its leaves and the catkins upon the dwarf willows,—"soft, silver notches up the smooth green stem," as Mr. Le Gallienne calls them,—sway slowly to and fro. Dark green ground-ivy creeps among the kingcups by the roadside, and clumps of yellow gorse are conspicuous upon the banks. So I pursue my way blithely enough, compiling my own *Colin Clout's Calendar*, until I reach the *Beehive Inn* standing back from the road, its dormer windows pushed open widely to admit the sweet morning air.

Fresh sights and sounds meet me as I approach Tewin. A familiar rustling among the dead sedges and leaves tells me that the voles are abroad betimes; and lapwings, hovering

over the beanfields, are calling *pe-wit, pe-wit.* In the far distance, almost upon the horizon, the harrows are at work, each with a team of three horses abreast. Crossing that branch of the Great Northern Railway which runs from Hatfield to Hertford, I come to a few cottages. I find by my map that the spot is called Attimore Hall; but when I question a girl who is busy at the well, I learn that most of the natives speak of their neighbourhood as Grub's Barn. Here I leave the road and cross the fields. The landscape is clear to the uttermost horizon, and I look across many miles of corn-fields where at present only tiny green blades appear among the weeds. Partridges, at this season flying in pairs, are off with a whirr and a rattle as I approach, to alight a hundred yards away. Women, their aprons gathered in their hands, are setting potatoes in a field just beyond what will soon be a leafy dell, and here I catch my first glimpse of Tewin, of the river Maran in the valley at my feet, and of "the decent church that tops the neighbouring hill."

Everybody who visits Tewin—celebrated by Scott in "The Romance of Queen-Hoo Hall"—seeks that spot in the churchyard where, among graves of Carringtons, Deans and other village worthies, is an altar-tomb riven asunder by several trees rooted in the grave beneath. Although old, the inscription upon one slab of this tomb is well preserved, and states that the lady buried below was once "the Rt. Honble. Lady Anne Grimston, wife to Sir Samuel Grimston, Bart. of Gorhambury in Hertfordshire and Daughter to the Late Rt. Honble. Earl of Thanet." Lady Anne died in 1717. There is a legend, known all over the county, that the worthy lady had, like the Sadducees, denied the doctrine of the Resurrection, and had expressed the wish that, if such a doctrine were indeed true, trees might spring from her grave. It has been affirmed that this legend is void of even a semblance of truth, Lady Anne having never expressed any views repugnant to orthodox Christians; but folks at Tewin, and, indeed, else-

where, receive the story as an article of faith: "Great," wrote Darwin, "is the power of steady misrepresentation." There are many things worthy of notice in the quaint little church of St. Peter, the tower of which, faced with rubble or concrete, bears a large, diamond-shaped clock upon its northern side. In the nave a very fine old brass represents a man standing in an attitude identical with that of the priest at Amwell. It is to the memory of Thomas Bygott, who died in 1610, and



Queen-Hoo Hall (Tewin).

whose family resided in "the Towne of Tewinge this 300 years." Now it happens that I have a weakness for retrospect, and as I look down upon this old, old grave, I find myself wondering what sort of place this "towne of Tewinge" was between, say, the years 1300 and 1310, when the Bygotts first graced its homesteads with their presence. Did the Bygotts quarrel, as Philip the Fair and Boniface VIII. were then quarrelling? Was the death of Wallace talked of in Tewin in

the end of August, 1305, the murder of Comyn in 1306, the torture of Margarita and Fra Dolcino in 1307, the death of Duns Scotus in 1308, or the flight of the Pope to Avignon in 1309? It may amuse one to ask such questions, but there is none to answer, so I saunter into the village, where is a tiny Post Office of truly rural appearance, some exceedingly old cottages, whose inmates watch me curiously from various coigns of vantage, and a public well, roofed with red tiles, in the centre of the common greensward. The *Rose and Crown*, its white-haired host standing in the doorway, promises material; so I rest awhile in one of its spacious chimney corners—they are vanishing fast now—and listen to an excellent discourse upon the good old method of sowing corn by hand. It is admitted, however, with but one dissentient, that the seed is more uniformly dispersed when machine sown; it is carried *nem. con.* that "summat is wrong wi' farmin'; leastways, yer can earn nuthin' at it in this part o' th' country. Ship's all right, er course, if yer unnerstand 'em, but it warnts summat more'n ship on a farm." On the wall, above the head of the master of assemblies, are some verses so highly derogatory to the "cloth" that I dare not transcribe them fully, but the first two stanzas are a fair sample of the rest:—

"Money! oh, Money! thy praises I sing,
Thou art my Saviour, my God and my King;
'Tis for thee that I preach and for thee that I pray
And make a collection on each Sabbath day.

"I have candles and all sorts of dresses to buy,
For I wish you to know that my church is called high;
I don't mean the structure of steeple or wall,
But so high that the Lord cannot reach it at all."

The road from Tewin to the pretty little village of Digswell descends gently the greater part of the way, and my journey is all the sweeter because I stay to gather a few anemones in the woods and to listen again to the call of the lapwings and the soft song of the robins in a neighbouring dell. I reach soon a little

bridge over the Maran; the water comes tumbling merrily over the stones, and ripples and swirls as it sweeps onwards to do its irrigating among the lush meadows below Tewin. I lean over the low parapet of the bridge in a spirit of delicious idleness, peering down upon the speckled trout among the weeds, "staying their wavy bodies 'gainst the stream." A wagtail is watching me furtively from a tiny islet of rotted herbage in mid-stream, and a wren is flitting fussily from twig to twig among the shrubs by the lodge gate. But I must continue my way, so press on steadily, meeting nobody whatever until I come to where the road twists sharply to the right, and lo! I am at the village of Digswell, so peaceful this afternoon, so closely nestled under the shadow of the magnificent viaduct of forty arches which carries the Great Northern Railway over the Maran valley. A heavy shower surprises me as I stand chatting with an old woman near the mill, so I seek shelter in a joiner's shed, while the raindrops patter heavily on the slate roof of the mill, and midges dance in the sunbeams that stream down at the open doorway despite the shower. I improve the occasion by listening to everything the joiner has to say, and he says a great deal. He tells me—*inter alia*—that when some years ago a bridge was being built over the Lea at or near Hertford, the workmen fished up from the ooze of the river an anchor which doubtless once held secure a Danish vessel! He has read about Alfred the Great and his exploits, and is quite sure the anchor must have belonged to one of the vessels which he grounded; so I content myself by hinting vaguely, like the Spectator when asked if the Saracen's Head resembled Sir Roger de Coverley, that much might be said on both sides. My credulity is soon put to a sorer test, for on reaching the rising ground upon which stands the church of St. John the Evangelist, of Early English architecture, I meet a postman who informs me that "our church is one of the old ones what the Romans built when they was over here." The square, battlemented tower of red brick, faced with rubble,

hardly corroborates the assertion; but it is an imposing little church, and I am sorry to find the door locked. Over the porch there is a sundial, placed here in 1822; in the graveyard there stand seven headstones side by side, erected to the memory of the Pennyfathers of Digswell Water, and one to the memory of James Willis "for 37 years clerk at Digswell Church." There is a fine old brass somewhere in the church, to John Peryent and his wife, dating from early in the fifteenth century, but as I cannot see through the walls, and am too well behaved to clamber up and peer through the windows, I must go on my way unsatisfied.

Descending into the Maran valley I cross the plank that spans the little river by the watercress beds—where, fluttering on sticks to alarm the birds, are rags of all hues and in various stages of decomposition—and in a few minutes enter Welwyn. Here I am in a strait betwixt two ways. About three miles south-west from Welwyn there stand a few cottages near Brocket Hall, at a spot called Cromer Hyde, and there, at a farmhouse within sight of *The Chequers*, I have an old friend who bears the classic name of Goldsmith. Now that friend is a good shot and can tell me more about the birds of Hertfordshire than most men, so I feel sorely tempted to stroll over to Cromer Hyde for an hour's chat and return to Welwyn in the evening. But I want to reach Wheathampstead to-day, so I leave local ornithology for a more convenient season, though not until I have been "much tumbled up and down in my mind," and spend an hour in exploring the side streets near the old mill. Passing the "Vineyard"—some cottages built in 1821; *The Baron* and *The White Horse*, I turn suddenly to the left and find myself near the church of St. Mary, which stands almost across the roadway at the north-west end of Welwyn. To this church Edward Young came as rector in July 1730. He was then in his fiftieth year.

To many of us Edward Young is the author of the *Night Thoughts*, and nothing more. But Young was a man of the

world, a lover of society, a caustic and shrewd satirist, and a man deeply versed in the vicissitudes of fortune. Many anecdotes touching his peculiarities are scattered here and there in the archives of English literature, and some of them relate to his life at Welwyn. He is said to have set up a sundial in his garden; beneath it was written *Eheu fugaces!* and when the dial was stolen the rector only remarked that the theft showed how true were those two words. He was the originator of the once famous "Assembly" at Welwyn, and chief patron of the bowling green, where he loved to see both men and maids at play. Boswell, in his own inimitable manner, has related how Johnson visited the poet's son here, and rector and Rambler seem to have fraternised agreeably; but the passage is too long to quote and too excellent to paraphrase. It was here, in the garden of the Rectory, that Young composed what are certainly some of the very best impromptu verses extant. He was walking with two ladies when he was summoned suddenly into the house. His companions had proved eminently agreeable, and he seemed in no haste to leave them. On reaching his gate he turned and said:—

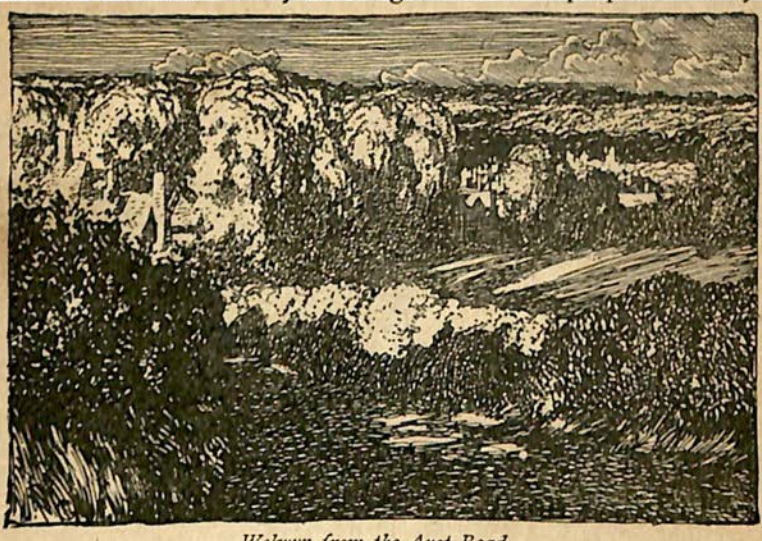
> "Thus Adam look'd when from the garden driven;
> And thus disputed orders sent from Heaven.
> Like him I go, and yet to go am loath;
> Like him I go, for angels drove us both.
> Hard was his fate, but mine still more unkind:
> *His* Eve went with him; but *mine* stays behind."

If this anecdote is not true it is at least *ben trovato*. I would give a trifle to have its authenticity proved, and to know what Lady Betty and her companion thought of those three couplets, and whether the fair listeners afterwards quarrelled as to which of them was Eve. History, however, so far as I am aware, is silent on these points; but it tells us that Young's stipend when at Welwyn was £300 a year—and that he thought it very little. Life at the Rectory was by no means of unruffled serenity. Young at one time engaged the services of a curate named

Kidgell. The curate was a young man of considerable ability, who watched his rector's conduct with a keen eye, and was not slow to ridicule his weaknesses when they quarrelled, as even clerics will. In a letter to Richardson in 1746 Young wrote: "I bless God, I am well: and I am composing; but it is in wood and stone; for I am building a steeple to my church; and, as a wise man in everything, I expect from you, an architect, a critique upon it." When, in 1755, Kidgell published his novel "The Card," the rector's architecture was not forgotten; for Young is ridiculed as an amateur builder who quarrels with his bricklayer in regard to expenditure. Moreover, Kidgell so far forgot himself as to speak of the Doctor as a sorry dabbler in languages, given to quoting scraps of Latin; as a rector who disliked a curate whose abilities exceeded his own, and who made a "dirty remnant of tattered crape" do duty for his gown. But a heavier cross than even a contentious curate was the vain search for preferment. He who wrote so eloquently on the mutability of earthly things and the worthlessness of riches was much given to bemoan his impecuniosity. On one occasion he wrote a letter—it bears no date—to Mrs. Howard, a mistress of George II., and requested her, in humble terms, to serve him by laying his case before the King. On the whole, Young, *Penseroso* though he was, does by no means appear to have found it enough that the Muse should "lap him in soft Lydian airs, married to immortal verse." Yet he was certainly respected by his parishioners; for an account of his last days, written long ago, tells us that "his pall was supported by the rectors and vicars of the neighbouring parishes. The *mourners* were his son, his nephew, and other near relatives, most of the bearers, and the *whole town of Welwyn.*" He died on April 5th, 1765, and was buried in the chancel of the church of St. Mary.

That Welwyn is a quiet little town now can hardly be denied. Its imposing post office, built a few years ago, is one of

the few really modern buildings in its streets. But two hundred years ago it seems to have been bustling and lively. At that time it was famous for its chalybeate waters. Writing to Richardson on November 11th, 1746, Young said: "The waters here are not new things; they were in great vogue fifty years ago; but, an eminent physician of this place dying, by degrees they were forgot. We have a physician now near us who drinks them himself all the winter; and a lady comes seven miles every morning for the same purpose. They



Welwyn from the Ayot Road.

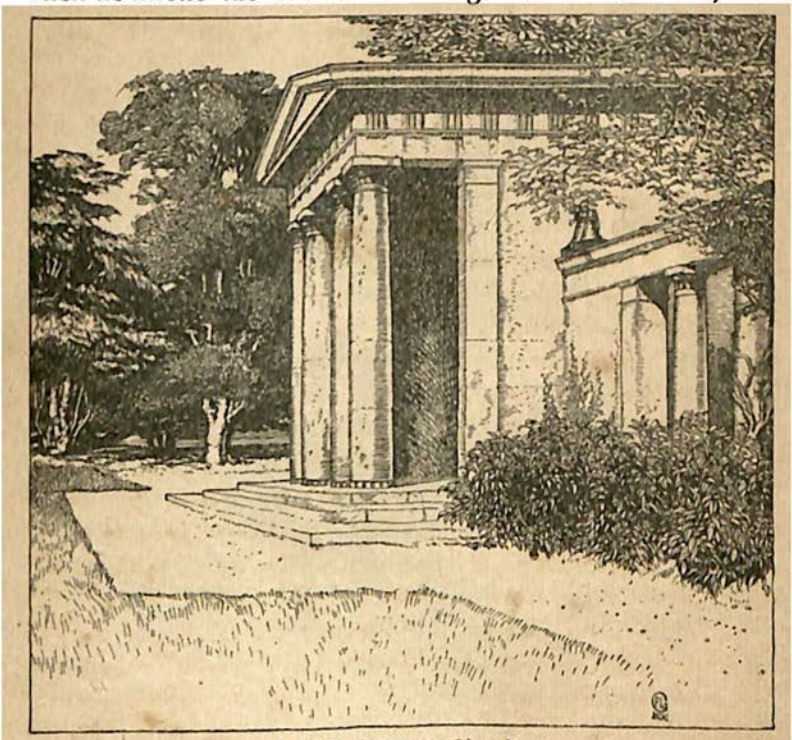
are the same as Tunbridge; and I myself have found from them just the same effect." Nor was literary or theological conversation lacking in Welwyn. It was here that Mrs. Elizabeth Montagu came expressly to talk with the author of the *Night Thoughts*, bringing in her train Mrs Boscawen and Mrs. Carter—pious, earnest souls, who would have been shocked indeed had they known what manner of letters the learned and Reverend poet was wont to pen in his lighter moments—one which I have in my mind certainly cannot be

quoted here.[1] It was at one time supposed that Young was the Parson Adams of Fielding, but this was denied once for all by Herbert Croft, who wrote the account of "the great Young," which is included in Johnson's *Lives of the Poets*.

My way from Welwyn towards Wheathampstead leads me through pleasant pastures and winding lanes. On my right lies Ayot St. Lawrence, where once lived Sir William Parr, brother of Catherine Parr of famous memory; on my left is the tiny village of Ayot St. Peter's. As I approach old Marford I can but linger by the wayside to admire the scenery. About a mile before me I catch a glimpse of St. Helen's Church almost surrounded by trees, in the centre of the village of Wheathampstead; in the far distance is Lamer Park; in the immediate foreground is the Devil's Dyke, where many years ago Marford John met his Satanic majesty under remarkable circumstances. I can hardly associate Dyke and devil in my mind this afternoon, for spring has come indeed, the swallows are hasting hither and thither or twittering in the skies, and a nightingale somewhere in the dell among the budding hazels is "singing of summer in full-throated ease." Some clouded yellow butterflies are sporting abroad, having been tempted from the chrysalis betimes by this warm sunshine, and small tortoiseshells are flitting from bank to bank down every hedgerow. But Dyke and devil were associated in the mind of Marford John, who was a disciple of John Barleycorn, and knew by experience, like Theseus in the play, "how easy is a bush supposed a bear." On a certain Saturday night he had lingered late over the tankard, and was doubtless, when he left the inn, "glorious" as Tam O'Shanter. His way homeward lay through the Devil's Dyke, and before he had got half through it, in darkness that might be felt, he was in sore straits.

[1] Vide, *e.g.* Young's letter to Mr. Williams at Nice, dated from Welwyn, Nov. 25, 1739 (*The Complete Works of the Rev. Edward Young, LL.D.*; London, 1854. Vol. I., p. ciii.).

Sure enough the devil was in his wake. It was useless for John to look round, for he could see nothing, so he swore eloquently, upon which the devil suddenly pushed him over, and John was so frightened that he moved not, but presently fell asleep. The devil evidently respected his slumbers, for when he awoke the Sabbath morning was well advanced, and



Ayot St. Lawrence Church.

the bells of Wheathampstead church were ringing for morning service. So John went into Marford and told his tale; but even Hertfordshire folk are incredulous at times, and they took John's story with a grain of salt. Doubtless the devil had as little to do with Marford John's adventure as with the old woman of Fakenham, and probably his story met

with the same fate as the story narrated in Bloomfield's ballad:

". . . Many a laugh went through the vale
And some conviction, too;
Each thought some other goblin tale
Perhaps was just as true."

Passing the village of New Marford, with its pretty cottage homes of diverse architecture, where *Pyrus Japonica* is in full blossom and daffodils stand in companies which would have delighted the eye of Wordsworth, I enter the street of Wheathampstead nearly opposite the lych gates of St. Helen's church. The sight of these gates reminds me of several customs, now almost obsolete, which were formerly practised in connection with the village funeral. Mr. W. R. Willis, F.R.Hist.S., in a paper upon "Some curious English Funeral Customs," has told us much about these gates in very few words. "A lych-gate," he writes, "is the covered gate in the graveyard wall with swinging leaves, where the body might await the arrival of the clergyman who was to conduct the last solemn rites of burial. They are generally built of oak with open timbers, and are surmounted with a square gabled roof, often tiled, though occasionally thatched. In some instances the wooden superstructure is based upon dwarf walls of brick, while there are examples, particularly in the North, of lych gates built entirely of stone with two chambers above, the latter generally being associated with some charitable bequest. The roof above the gate and the seats inside the older examples, provided accommodation for the mourners awaiting the arrival of the clergyman, while provision was made for the bier by having the leaves of the door hung diagonally, parallel to each other, the coffin resting on each leaf, thus serving a purpose now fulfilled by the undertaker's trestles. From the Rev. E. S. Cutt's 'Dictionary of the Church' we learn that at Tavistock, in Devon, there is a small room on each side of the gate, having seats on three sides of it and a table in the middle. According

to the same authority, there is, especially in Cornwall, sometimes a great stone called the 'Lichstone,' on which the coffin can be placed while the funeral procession is waiting." The lych gates at Wheathampstead are hardly suggestive of death this glad spring day, but look rather as though "for whispering lovers made."

A contributor to the *Gentleman's Magazine* (vol. 76), who signed himself *Clericus Leicestriensis*, wrote: "The people of Hertfordshire are justly proud of their county, which they love to call the Garden of England." It was a garden indeed to Charles Lamb. When, in his happier moments, he penned incomparable letters to his many friends, he would return again and again to wander in fancy "through the green plains of pleasant Hertfordshire." The words are his own, and not his own. They make the beautiful line which closes the essay on "My Relations," and must have haunted the memory of a thousand lovers of the county, yet no one could assign it to its origin, until the other day a student hardly less omnivorous than Lamb himself, Mr. W. J. Craig, in his Temple edition of *Elia*, tracked it to its source in a poem by W. Vallans, the *Tale of Two Swans*, quoted in Hearne's edition of Leland's *Itinerary*. Here, no doubt, Lamb came upon it, looking for reminiscences of his well-beloved county; or rather, came upon what Vallans actually wrote,

> "About this time the Lady Venus views
> The fruitful fields of pleasant Hartfordshire,"

and his memory, after its delightful habit, retained the cadence and the phrase, to reproduce it after many days embellished and mellowed by glorious misquotation. And of all those green plains and fruitful fields none were dearer to him than the neighbourhood of Wheathampstead. To Southey he once wrote: "I have but just got your letter, being returned from Herts, where I have passed a few red-letter days with much pleasure. I would describe the county to you, as you

have done by Devonshire, but alas! I am a poor pen at that same." In 1819 he wrote to his friend Manning, who was then living in Hertfordshire, "How are my cousins, the Gladmans of Wheathampstead, and farmer Bruton? Mrs. Bruton is a glorious woman." He goes on to say in the same letter that he once meditated a poem in blank verse, on Mackery End, a hamlet a mile and a half north-west from Wheathampstead, but could get no further than

"Hail, Mackery End."

The Muse of prose dealt more kindly with his aspiration, for the essay on Mackery End is one of Elia's most exquisite and characteristic discourses. Beginning with a tender character-sketch of Bridget Elia, or Mary Lamb, the story continues:—

"We made an excursion together a few summers since, into Hertfordshire, to beat up the quarters of some of our less-known relations in that fine corn country.

"The oldest thing I remember is Mackery End; or Mackarel End, as it is spelt, perhaps more properly, in some old maps of Hertfordshire; a farm-house—delightfully situated within a gentle walk from Wheathampstead. I can just remember having been there, on a visit to a great-aunt, when I was a child, under the care of Bridget; who, as I have said, is older than myself by some ten years. I wish that I could throw into a heap the remainder of our joint existences, that we might share them in equal division. But that is impossible. The house was at that time in the occupation of a substantial yeoman, who had married my grandmother's sister. His name was Gladman. My grandmother was a Bruton, married to a Field. The Gladmans and the Brutons are still flourishing in that part of the county, but the Fields are almost extinct. More than forty years had elapsed since the visit I speak of; and, for the greater portion of that period, we had lost sight of the other two branches also. Who or what sort of persons inherited Mackery End—kindred or strange folk—we were

afraid almost to conjecture, but determined some day to explore.

"By somewhat a circuitous route, taking the noble park at Luton in our way from Saint Alban's, we arrived at the spot of our anxious curiosity about noon. The sight of the old farm-house, though every trace of it was effaced from my recollection, affected me with a pleasure which I had not experienced for many a year. For though *I* had forgotten it, *we* had never forgotten being there together, and we had been talking about Mackery End all our lives, till memory on my part became mocked with a phantom of itself, and I thought I knew the aspect of a place, which, when present, O how unlike it was to *that*, which I had conjured up so many times instead of it!

"Still the air breathed balmily about it; the season was in the 'heart of June,' and I could say with the poet,

> 'But thou, that didst appear so fair
> To fond imagination,
> Dost rival in the light of day
> Her delicate creation!'

"Bridget's was more a waking bliss than mine, for she easily remembered her old acquaintance again—some altered features, of course, a little grudged at. At first, indeed, she was ready to disbelieve for joy; but the scene soon re-confirmed itself in her affections—and she traversed every outpost of the old mansion, to the wood-house, the orchard, the place where the pigeon-house had stood (house and birds were alike flown)—with a breathless impatience of recognition, which was more pardonable perhaps than decorous at the age of fifty odd. But Bridget in some things is behind her years.

"The only thing left was to get into the house—and that was a difficulty which to me singly would have been insurmountable: for I am terribly shy in making myself known to strangers and out-of-date kinsfolk. Love, stronger than scruple, winged my cousin in without me; but she soon returned with

a creature that might have sat to a sculptor for the image of Welcome. It was the youngest of the Gladmans; who, by marriage with a Bruton, had become mistress of the old mansion. A comely brood are the Brutons. Six of them, females, were noted as the handsomest young women in the county. But this adopted Bruton, in my mind, was better than they all—more comely. She was born too late to have remembered me. She just recollected in early life to have had her cousin Bridget once pointed out to her, climbing a stile. But the name of kindred, and of cousinship, was enough. Those slender ties, that prove slight as gossamer in the rending atmosphere of a metropolis, bind faster, as we found it, in hearty, homely, loving Hertfordshire. In five minutes we were as thoroughly acquainted as if we had been born and bred up together; were familiar, even to the calling each other by our Christian names. So Christians should call one another."

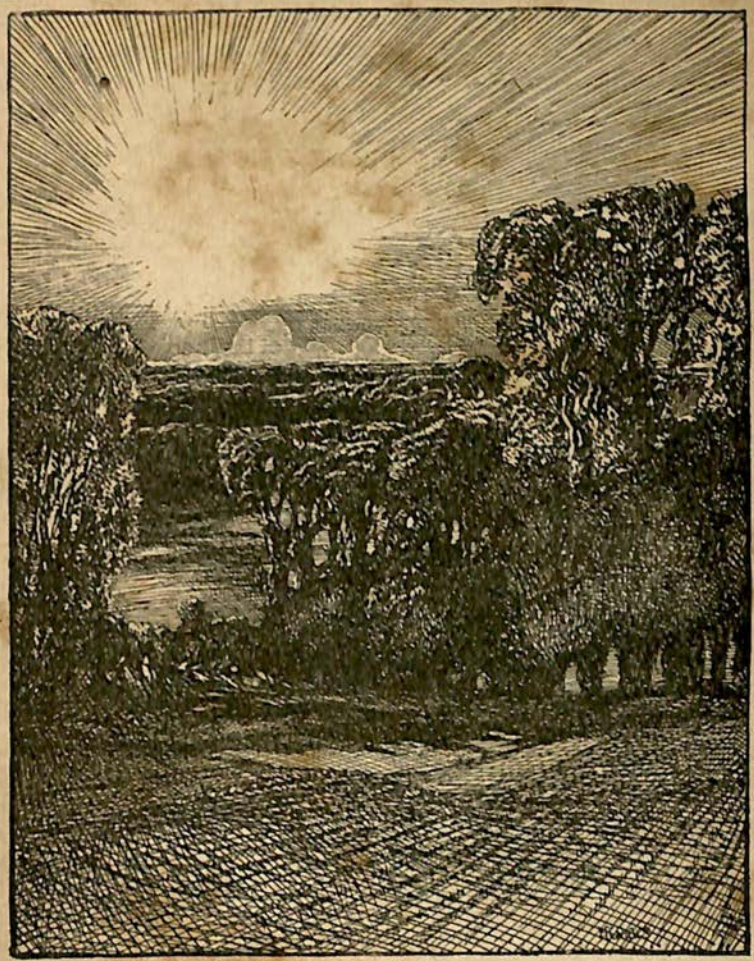
And so Lamb rambles on to the exquisite close. It is about eighty years since it all happened, but as I ramble from Wheathampstead to the Folly and presently lean awhile on the hand-bridge over the Lea near Batford Mill, the genius of the whole neighbourhood seems none other than that of the gentle Elia, whose figure I can almost see flit before me, now as it appears in Wageman's drawing and now as in the caricature prefixed to the early edition of Talfourd.

The farm at Mackery End, or Mackarel End, still stands, guarded by round ricks of Hertfordshire straw, but the front has been renewed. The room in which the Lambs' sate is preserved almost as it was, except that a window or so has been closed and the process of addition has thrown it to the rear. The back of the old house is, however, much as it must have been in Lamb's day. It is quite a place of pilgrimage; good literary Americans return to their country shamefaced if they have not visited Lamb's Mackery End.

Nearly 500 years ago, in the days of King Henry V., John Wheathampsted, who according to a Harleian MS. was a son

of Hugh Bostock of Wheathampstead and of Margaret Makery of Mackery End, was 33rd Abbot of St. Albans. Now the Abbots of St. Albans were important persons; they were at one time accorded precedence over all the other mitred abbots of England and ruled the richest of our abbeys. Canon Venables, who has with great diligence brought together many interesting details touching the office and prerogatives of abbots, tells us that at St. Albans the abbot occupied the lord's seat at the centre of the table, was served on silver plate, and entertained noblemen and other folk of high degree in sumptuous fashion. Matthew Paris, himself a monk of St. Albans, charges them with the abuse of their privileges of hospitality and says that they at times entertained ladies of rank, contrary to the rule of St. Benedict. Hearne, in his preface to the *Chronicon of John of Wheathamstede*, mentions that John was ordained in 1382, and as we know that the canon could ordain no man priest who was under twenty-five years of age, and that in 1462 the abbot petitioned King Edward IV. touching the poverty into which the abbey had of late fallen, John must have lived more than a hundred years. He was elected Abbot in 1420; he ruled the famous monastery for twenty years, and then, fearful by reason of the troublous times, and dispirited, perhaps, by the decline of his friend Humphrey Duke of Gloucester, whom he had admitted into the fraternity at St. Alban's in 1423, he resigned in the presence of "a certain clerk, Matthew Depset, and other officers of the monastery"; but, after John Stoke had for some years reigned in his stead, he was re-elected and the re-election is recorded in *Hist. de Rebus Gestis.* Now, like most men, I know little concerning the theological views of the worthy abbot and certainly care less; but if there is truth in the old maxim *laborare est orare*, John's orisons were frequent and efficacious. Like Sir Walter Raleigh, he "toiled terribly," which cannot always be said of those who figure in the chronicles of mediæval monasticism. He designed the screen erected over the high altar of the abbey by William of Wallingford; gave to

the church a pair of organs worth about fifty pounds, then a very large sum; embellished the Lady Chapel; built the nine



Near Ayot St. Peter.

windows in the north aisles of baptistery and nave, and "the great west window"; provided his own resting place, the "Sepulchral Chapel of Abbot Wheathampsted"; founded a

library in the Monk's College, Oxford, and doubtless planned and executed other improvements which afforded his fellow monks what old Chaucer would call "many another delitable sight." His portrait in the Cottonian Library is embellished with an eagle *volant* and a lamb *passant*.

I have loitered so long in these villages to-day that I find myself still a wayfarer when daylight has wholly waned and the stars are looking down from distances inexpressible by arithmetic, as they looked down when these villages had neither local habitation nor name. The day has been hot indeed for April, and two weather-worn rustics appear to enjoy the freshness of the evening as they sit in the doorway of their cottage homes, the wreaths of smoke from their pipes drifting slowly before the breeze. A little later I reach my inn, and, in no haste to sleep, I sit for awhile at the open casement just above the sign-board. Some dogs are answering one another from neighbouring farmyards, but their baying ceases at length. The men turn in to supper; the doors are closed; and I hear nothing but the bell of a belated cyclist and the subdued voices of host and hostess in the bar below.

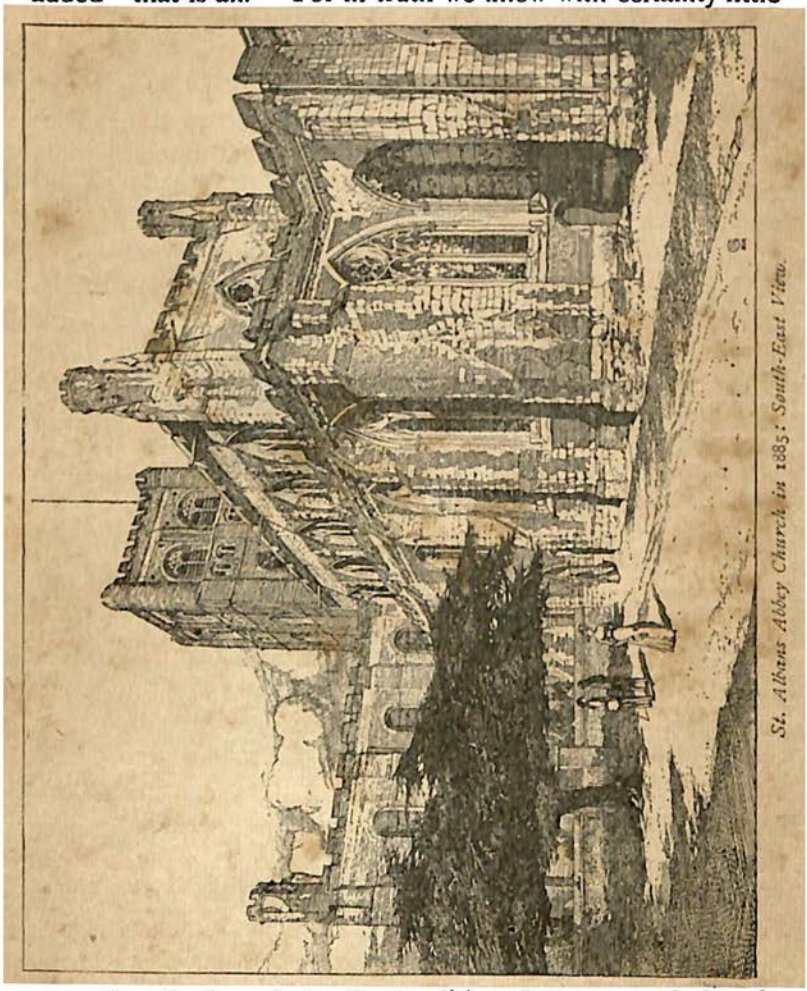
CHAPTER III

ST. ALBANS, WATFORD

PERHAPS the best view of the city of St. Albans is that which lies spread out before you from the footpath between St. Stephen's Church and the village of Park Street. In the foreground are the winding Ver, the silk-mill, the old gate-house of the monastery, the ruins of Sopwell Nunnery; the streets of the city lie closely together upon the sides and summit of the hill; the churches of St. Stephen in the south, of St. Michael in the west and of St. Peter in the north stand as sentinels watching the outlying suburbs. High over all, "dusky and huge, enlarging on the sight," stands the Abbey of St. Albans, renovated almost beyond recognition, but, as Freeman says, "still in style, material and feeling that one among our great churches which most thoroughly carries us back to old English and even to earlier days." It is thus, from the footpath I have mentioned, that I look upon the city this morning "nigh where the ancient Verlam stood of yore," the higher housetops showing in clear relief against a deep blue and cloudless sky. St. Albans has been a city for four and twenty years: it was a town, which the Saxons took occasion to destroy, fourteen hundred years ago.

In the Archiepiscopal Library in Lambeth Palace there is a MS. entitled "The Saint Albans Chronicle." In that MS. you may read: "In the days of Asclepiodotus was gret perse-

cution of Cristen pepell by the tyrant Diocletian. In this same time Saint Alban was martered." The chronicler might have added "that is all." For in truth we know with certainty little



St. Albans Abbey Church in 1685: South-East View.

more than the bare fact. But tradition, that ever ready henchman, steps in to our assistance, and the whole story of the protomartyr of Britain has been as greatly enriched from

legend as the story of Joseph of Arimathea and the founding of Glastonbury Abbey. It seems indisputable that a bitter persecution raged in Britain shortly after the year 300 A.D., and that, as Gildas tells us, a great many churches were destroyed, the sacred writings were burnt in the streets, and priest and people perished together. But the Rev. William Hunt, one of the latest and most authoritative writers on the English Church, is of opinion that "the assertion that the martyrdom took place in Diocletian's time must be merely a later guess." A more than usually circumstantial narrative of the martyrdom of St. Alban has been gathered together from many sources by Edward Churton in his *Early English Church*. "Alban, before the persecution arose, was a heathen; but a Christian priest, who had fled for shelter from his pursuers to Alban's house, became the instrument of his conversion. Struck with the devout behaviour of his guest, who passed great part of the night as well as his days in watching and prayer, Alban began to inquire of his religion; and the end was, that he was soon persuaded to turn from idolatry, and to become a hearty Christian. He had for a few days enjoyed the company and instruction of his new friend, when the Roman Governor of Verulam, hearing that the priest was hidden at Alban's house, sent a party of soldiers to take him. Alban presented himself at the door in the cassock usually worn by his guest, and, before the mistake was discovered, was brought before the magistrates for the person whose dress he wore. There boldly declaring himself a Christian, after enduring to be beaten with rods, he was sentenced to be beheaded. The place of his death was a rising ground beyond the little river Ver, to which the passage was by a bridge, then thronged by a great crowd of people, flocking to behold the spectacle. Alban, eager to reach the place before the close of day, instead of waiting to cross the bridge, made his way through the stream; and this act of devoted zeal is said to have had such an effect on the soldier who was appointed to be his execu-

tioner, that he threw down the sword and asked to die with him. The request was granted and the two comrades received together the palm of martyrdom. In after years, the wonder of a simple age was shown in tales of miracles which were said to have attended Alban's martyrdom. What was better, and a due honour to the first martyr of Britain, a church of beautiful structure was built upon the place. This was standing in the time of Bede, about four hundred years after Alban's death. Offa, King of Mercia, in the eighth century, founded an abbey there; and the abbey-church, partly built by the Saxons with Roman bricks, taken, as it seems, from a still older sacred building, is one of the most noble standing monuments of the ancient Christianity of Britain."

Whether or not these "tales of miracle" gained much credence in early Saxon days, they flourished exceedingly at a later period. The name of the priest whom Alban had sheltered was Amphibalus, and the legends extant concerning priest and convert form a characteristic study in the evolution of hagiology. I have sometimes thought that the monks, when they fell a musing in their cloisters, or beside the Ver on Fridays, must surely have deemed it desirable that such and such events should have happened and then set about writing a description of how they *did* happen. We read that Amphibalus was eventually captured in Wales, and was put to death at the village of Redbourn, four miles from St. Albans. More than eight hundred years later Warren de Cambridge, 20th Abbot of St. Albans, founded a hospital for leprous women at St. Mary de Pré, a little distance west from the Abbey. It happened in this wise. St. Amphibalus appeared to a man of Walden in the night watches, and told him that the place where his bones rested was sacred; bidding him also tell Abbot Warren that the spot should be venerated. The saint was obeyed. Warren made inquiry and learned that St. Alban had once himself appeared in a vision to a layman and revealed the spot where the bones of Saint Amphibalus rested; that they had been

removed to St. Albans, many signs and wonders attending their removal; that the shrine of St. Alban had been carried out to meet the holy relics, and had become miraculously diminished in weight, thereby facilitating the journey; that in a great drought then prevailing there came just at this moment a miraculous shower of rain, which fell upon the "golden hoods" and "costly feather work" of the monks without wetting them. So, learning all this, the worthy Abbot built, on the spot where these miracles were wrought, the church of St. Mary de Pré, and there he made a refuge for leprous women. A charter of the foundation may be seen in Matthew Paris. On the 10th of May, 1467, one Sibilla Bernwell entered this foundation as a nun. I mention the fact incidentally for one reason only. Sibilla was a daughter of John Bernwell of St. Albans, who, according to a record in the Heralds' office, was one among five men in the town worth £10 a year, the persons in the whole county of Hertfordshire worth so much numbering only eighty! Mr. A. E. Gibbs, F.L.S., in his *Historical Records of St. Albans*, a little book which no historian of the locality can afford to ignore, has brought together the leading facts in the history of this hospital of St. Mary de Pré, and very interesting facts they are. I will quote his words touching the fate of this foundation. "The Church and Hospital stood on what is now a meadow on the north-east side of the present Gorhambury Road, and through this same meadow the old Watling Street passed. The present north road was constructed in 1826–34, and originally the Roman Road ran from Gorham Block to the Pondyards without crossing the river. The Hospital and its buildings stood on both sides of the Watling Street. The Pré Church was standing until 1793, when, according to Newcome, it was used as a barn, and the cemetery was then a farmyard. The graves in the churchyard were clearly visible until 1827, when they were levelled and a gravestone was then found, and was converted into a doorstep for St.

Michael's Workhouse. The cottages known as the 'Three Chimnies,' demolished in 1849, formed part of the Hospital."

It is all history or legend now, and lapsing into oblivion. You may skirt the southern suburbs of St. Albans, loiter in the abbey orchard or along the footpath beside the Ver; you may pass the reed beds, and the old mill, and St. Michael's Church and find yourself on the site of the Hospital of St. Mary de Pré; but unless you converse with some learned cleric, or lay antiquarian—there are many in St. Albans—you will learn little concerning abbot, or monk, or nun, or saint. Father Time's "defacing fingers" have done their work only too well among the ruins hereabouts, and the features are so marred that hardly enough is left to waken recognition. To-day this truth is borne in upon me, for I have been contemplating the enormous abbey from many standpoints, till, overawed by so vast a subject, I feel that I must leave its presence for a little, and return with fresh eyes. So I cross the Holywell Hill and walk to the bottom of Sopwell Lane, then, turning to the right, I come to a bridge over the Ver and am before a mass of tumbled and ivy-mantled ruin, the haunt of many wrens. All trace of cloistered seclusion is obliterated, yet here was once Sopwell Nunnery. For the origin of this religious house we turn to Matthew Paris. Two devout women once lived in a hut by the riverside, until the abbot of the monastery, hearing of their piety and evil plight, provided them with a better retreat, where in due time thirteen sisters lived under Benedictine rules. The two women, in the early days of their voluntary privation, used to dip their bread in a spring near by, so the spot became known as Sopwell. According to Clutterbuck, in one of his three ponderous folios, it was as far back as the early days of Henry I. when these devotees dipped their morsel; for Abbot Geoffrey de Gorham, who was made Abbot of St. Albans in 1119, was witness to a gift of land to Sopwell Nunnery. Later in its history the establishment witnessed vows sufficiently incongruous with its origin; for we read in Camden's *Britannia*

and in Stukeley's *Itinerarium Curiosum* that at this nunnery Henry VIII. was married to Anne Boleyn. I do not hope to

Sunset, St. Stephens.

find any trace of King Hal or his unfortunate lady, although considerable masses of ruin yet remain and much of an outer

wall, said to have been built by Sir Richard Lee. Dame Juliana Berners, who first in England wrote a treatise on *Fysshynge with an angle*, was once prioress here. Her distinction is doubly unique; in the long and illustrious list of writers upon angling she is the first writer and the only woman. She was evidently energetic and of somewhat masculine character; but we know little of her life and cannot say whether she was beloved or hated by the nuns whom she ruled. Was she,—like Lioba, Abbess of Bischofsheim, who also once ruled here,—learned in the Scriptures, beautiful in person and lovely in spirit; or was she like a certain prioress of Wimborne, who enforced discipline by punishment and upon whose grave the younger nuns danced for joy? I know not where the dust of Juliana Berners lies, so cannot "peer and botanise" upon her grave. The chattering of a reed sparrow reaches my ears from the lower meadow where the Ver ripples past the cress-beds, so I wander to the extremity of the convent walls to listen to him while I may and to pluck a few marsh marigolds to the memory of the nuns of Sopwell whose nunnery fell finally into disuse and decay in the days of Charles II.

The arts of War and of Peace, as the cartoons of Lord Leighton remind us, are often closely associated. You look at a spot which nature and art have vied in beautifying and perhaps one of your first thoughts is that here was once fought out some bloody encounter. Yorkist and Lancastrian surged around this nunnery at Sopwell, when they fought the first battle of St. Albans on 21st, 22nd or 23rd May (according to different authorities) in the year 1455. The White Rose triumphed after a very short struggle, Henry VI. was wounded in the neck by an arrow, taken prisoner in a shop in the town, carried to the apartments of the Duke of York in the abbey, and thence removed to that goal of the unfortunate, the Tower of London. There is an account of this battle, by John Bayley, Esq., of the Record Office, in *Archæologia* (vol. xx. 519), and several references to it in the Paston correspondence. Blood

enough was not shed on this occasion, and another battle was waged on Bernard's Heath a little north from St. Peter's Church in 1461. The Yorkists were driven back towards the centre of the town, and night coming on, a flight ensued. The Lancastrians plundered the town, and, according to Hallam, the abbey also, a piece of barbarism which changed Abbot John Wheathampsted from a Lancastrian to a Yorkist. Many who fell on that day were buried in the graveyard of St. Peter's Church. Sir John Grey of Groby, husband of Elizabeth Woodville, who was afterwards married to Edward IV., was among the slain. Bernard's Heath has been for many years covered thick with blackberry bushes, and, by reason of its many deep dells, is a rare spot for a game of hide and seek. There was doubtless grim seeking and hiding on that day of battle.

Enough of strife. There is much literature on such topics and I need not add thereto. For the sake of old memories I lunch in the little panelled parlour of *The George Inn*, hung round with prints of prize birds and pheasant shooting and steeplechasing. There has been an inn on this spot since the year 1401. The inn has always been an important factor in life at St. Albans, for the town was a resting place on the road to Holyhead in the good old coaching days. Travellers from the north, too, found it a convenient spot for refreshment before finishing their journey to London. For these and for other reasons St. Albans has at times entertained many illustrious guests, or afforded a temporary resting place for dead personages of high degree. Offa II., King of Mercia, came here to search for the remains of Saint Alban; when the coffin was discovered he put a circlet of gold upon the saint's head and placed the sacred relics in a reliquary of exceeding beauty. Then he besought Pope Adrian for permission to build a monastery to the memory of St. Alban, and the request was granted. King Henry I. and Queen Matilda with many nobles and ecclesiastics were present at the dedication of the church after its reconstruction by Paul de Caen. King Stephen came here and was the guest of Abbot Robert de

Gorham. Nicholas Breakspear came here from the neighbouring village of Abbot's Langley, but was refused permanent admittance into the monastery because of his scanty knowledge; so, nothing daunted, he studied abroad and became Pope Adrian IV. King John, probably "flown with insolence and wine," came here with a numerous train during his struggle with the Barons. King Henry III. was frequently at the abbey during the rule of John de Hertford, an abbot who was wont to entertain so many guests that stabling was provided for 300 horses. King Edward I. held his court in St. Albans before his journey to Scotland. The body of Queen Eleanor rested in the town on its way to Westminster, and a cross, destroyed just before 1702, was erected to commemorate the event. King Edward II. came to the abbey when John de Marinis ruled, and a second visit of this monarch was described by Thomas Walsingham. Queen Philippa was "churched" in the abbey after the birth of her son Edmund at King's Langley; the body of "old John of Gaunt, time-honoured Lancaster," being borne to London, rested in the sacred precincts; King Richard II. lodged in the town in the autumn of the same year. "Shall I go on? or have I said enow?"

Leaving kings and queens, I must not forget that Sir John Mandeville was born at St. Albans. Has he not told us so himself, and dare any reader question the *ipsissima verba* of that most valiant and renowned traveller? Has he not narrated, for the edification of posterity, the story of his journeyings by land and sea, from his setting out at Michaelmas, 1322, to his return about thirty years later? Munchausen himself hardly saw greater marvels. Even those wonders which Mandeville saw with his own eyes need not be despised in a day of small things and conscientious chronicles. He tells us how a thorn from the crown of Christ was given to him as a great favour; how the Sultan of Babylon wished to bestow upon him in marriage a Prince's daughter; how he gained entrance into the Temple at Jerusalem because he had letters

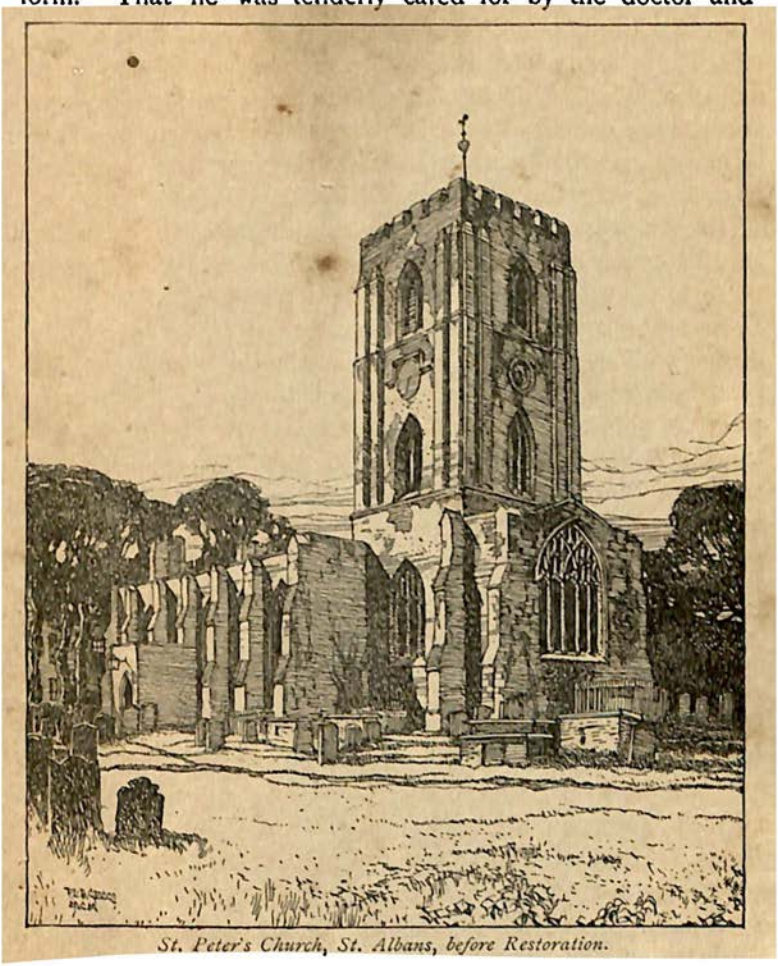
bearing the great seal of the Sultan; how he possessed diamonds from India which, well wetted with May-dew, grew larger every year; how he drank at the Well of Youth near the city of Polombe, the waters whereof had the odour and taste of all spices; and how he went down into the perilous valley near the river Pison, which valley was full of devils and was an entrance to hell; albeit, the place had great store of gold and silver. Yet our credulity is even more severely tasked when the adventurous knight speaks of things which were matters of hearsay. He tells us that in the church of St. Catherine, on Mount Sinai, monks displayed the head of that saint, the bloody cloth in which angels carried her body thither, and the bush which was burned without being consumed. He says that iron cast into the Dead Sea will swim, but feathers will sink, which, he is careful to add, "are things contrary to nature"; that in the river Indus men found eels thirty feet long; that the head of Adam was discovered after the flood at Golgotha; that on the Island of Calonak the King had 14,000 elephants; that the snails there were so large that many men could lodge in their shells, and that all the different kinds of fish in the surrounding seas came to the shore in turn once a year, in order that men might catch as many as they would. Happy Calonak!

But perhaps the most noteworthy circumstance related by Mandeville is that which explains to us the origin of roses. It appears that at the east end of the City of Bethlehem there stood in Sir John's day a fair and handsome church containing forty-four large marble pillars. Now a certain fair maiden was charged with having grievously sinned, and was condemned to be burnt in the field between the church and the city. She prayed that by some miracle or sign her innocence might be made manifest. The fire ceased to burn, the hot faggots were transformed into red rose bushes, and the faggots untouched by fire became white rose bushes, both bearing many roses. "And these were the first rose trees and roses, both white and red,

that ever any man saw." Elsewhere Mandeville says, "many men have great liking to hear of strange things of diverse countries." This, at least, can hardly be gainsaid; for at one time there are said to have been more manuscripts of the travels of Sir John Mandeville, Knight, than of any work saving only the Scriptures. St. Albans should be proud of Sir John; but where is his monument? One Weever, writing in 1631, says he himself saw the tomb of Sir John de Mandeville in the Church of the Guilliamites of Liège, with the date 16th November, 1371. Bale, in his *Summarium*, mentions his burial in that church, and states that he died on 17th November, 1372. Salmon, in his history of Hertfordshire (1728) confirms the local belief that the traveller was buried in the abbey. "Here is also an English and Latin epitaph for Sir John Mandeville." Whether he was buried in St. Albans or not, I should like to see a monument erected in the market place or in broad St. Peter's Street to perpetuate the memory of this adventurous and inventive gentleman, of whose book there are, I believe, nineteen MSS. in the British Museum. Do I share the belief of modern criticism that perhaps the very name of Mandeville is a myth? Perish the thought!

About the year 1740 one Nathaniel Cotton came to St. Albans and settled here as a physician. As old Auchinleck would have said, the doctor kept a mad-house and called it a "Collegium Insanorum." This private asylum stood on the west side of what is now College Street, which no doubt owes its name to Cotton's singular "Collegium." Dr. Cotton, by the testimony of those who have written about him, was a kind, cultured and skilful physician. Like Cowper, he might have written, "I was a poet, too." His poems entitled "Content" and "The Fireside" are known to many lovers of English verse; his reputation, however, is chiefly due to his literary friendships. He attended Young during his last illness at Welwyn; but his name is more nearly and dearly associated with the name of William Cowper. For in December 1763

Cowper was brought to Dr. Cotton's asylum to be cared for in his madness, which had then assumed its most distressing form. That he was tenderly cared for by the doctor and



St. Peter's Church, St. Albans, before Restoration.

appreciated both his professional skill and his conversation we learn from his own pen ; but we know little of Cowper's life at St. Albans, for, with his unfailing delicacy of sentiment, he wrote,

"It will be proper to draw a veil over the secrets of my prison house." Yet he has recorded one strangely touching incident. He had been with Dr. Cotton about three months, when his brother, a Fellow of Benet College, Cambridge, visited him here. They rambled in the garden together, dined, and spent a cheerful afternoon. "In the morning I dreamed that the sweetest boy I ever saw came dancing up to my bedside; he seemed just out of leading-strings, yet I took particular notice of the firmness and steadiness of his tread. The sight affected me with pleasure, so that I awoke for the first time with a sensation of delight on my mind." From that day the poet slowly recovered. He was much attached to a servant who attended him at this time. "I am not quite alone," he afterwards wrote from Huntingdon, "having brought a servant with me from St. Albans, who is the very mirror of fidelity and affection for his master. And whereas the Turkish Spy says he kept no servant, because he would not have an enemy in his house, I hired mine, because I would have a friend." Cowper remained with Dr. Cotton until 7th June, 1765, when he left St. Albans at four o'clock in the morning, attended by his servant, and proceeded to Cambridge. Dr. Cotton died on 2nd August, 1788, and was buried in the churchyard of St. Peter, where an altar tombstone marks his resting place.

This morning, after passing the triangular Abbey Church Yard where, on 26th August, 1556, George Tankerville was burned alive by order of Bonner,—the Right Reverend Father in God, Edmund, Lord Bishop of London,—I find myself once more contemplating the longest Gothic nave in the world. Its length is 284 feet. The entire abbey, from Lady Chapel to west front, measures 550 feet, and is only exceeded in length by the grand old Cathedral of Winchester, which is six feet longer. I have but one feeling as I walk slowly round the whole building—an impression of its vast dimensions. The renovations of Sir Gilbert Scott and of Lord Grimthorpe

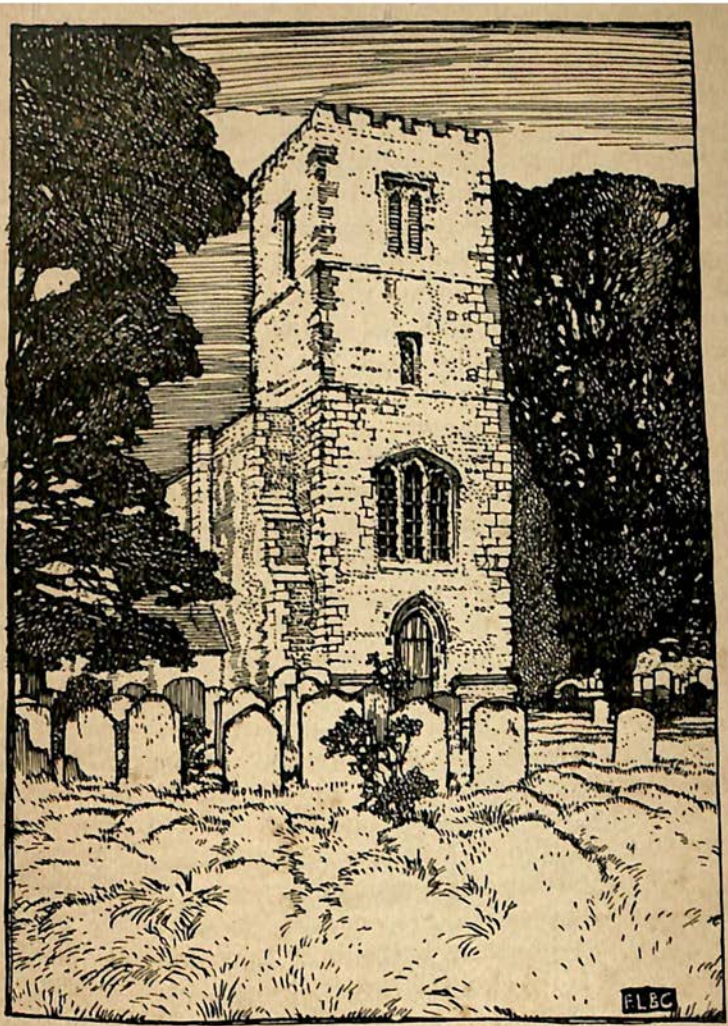
have almost turned an old abbey into a new one; but Albanians should not grumble, for they kept their old abbey for a long time. A church of some kind has stood upon this spot since shortly after the year 300 A.D., and it is nearly a thousand years since the abbots Ealdred and Ealmer planned the erection of a new church out of the abundant material ready near by in the ruined city of Verulamium. The building of the new structure was not undertaken until Paul de Caen became abbot; I have already mentioned its consecration in the year 1115. Thus, as may still be seen, the Abbey of St. Albans was originally a Norman structure; the tower preserving most characteristics of the building as it was erected by Paul de Caen. The abbots Robert de Gorham, John de Cella, and William de Trumpyngtone made many alterations, especially at the western end of the nave; and the appearance of the exterior was greatly altered during the Perpendicular period. But the fact remains that here, for sixteen hundred years, a church has stood as a witness to the stability of the Christian religion, and I am not disposed to grumble because it now bears but little resemblance to the original.

There were in all forty abbots of St. Albans; the last, Richard Borcham de Stevenache, surrendered his abbacy in 1539, when so many gentlemen of like profession ceased to officiate. Mr. W. R. Willis has recently reminded us that the market of St. Albans was "originally included in the charter which Richard I. gave to the abbot" (John de Cella), and that the town and burgesses are mentioned in the Domesday Survey as possessions of the "abbot and Convent of St. Albans." The extension of the rule of the abbot from the monastery to the town itself led in time to much strife of a kind which men seldom wage in these degenerate days. There were many bones of contention. In appears, for instance, that the abbot claimed a monopoly for his mills, and it was enacted that every man's grain must be ground therein. But the townsmen grew refractory; they built mills of their own; they

ground their own corn. After much strife the abbot, for the time being, triumphed; and the refractory Albanians had to appease him by a gift of wine—a gift usually acceptable in monasteries, unless painters are invariably perverters of the truth. Then the abbot cast jealous eyes upon woods and waters; he enclosed the forest and preserved the fish. Again the townsmen rose and Abbot Hugh de Eversden, who was no fit man to govern or to guide, yielded to their demands. Later on matters grew worse, weapons were freely used and the sanctity of the abbey was violated; nor was peace finally established between "town and gown" until the abbots had no longer any power to exercise, and presently ceased to be. The story of this uprising has been told by Froude.

The abbots are gone, and—in the estimation of many—their abbey is gone too. But you may still linger in these vast aisles, so full of mementoes of the past, and can but feel awed as you try to realise how venerable are their associations. The screens of St. Cuthbert and of Abbot Wallingford may be to you more eloquent than many sermons, and the shrine of St. Alban and the tomb of Humphrey Duke of Gloucester have their message too. In the baptistery there stood for some centuries a brass font in which children of the Kings of Scotland had been baptised. It is said to have been given to the abbey by Sir Richard Lee, and Camden says that it bore a Latin inscription written by the donor. Weever and Fuller both mention this font; the latter, in his *Worthies*, says it "was taken away, in the late cruel war, as it seems, by those hands which suffered nothing how sacred soever to stand, which could be converted to money."

Well, I am not writing a handbook to St. Albans Abbey; so I pass out at the new west front, which to me, at least, seems a stately and imposing entrance worthy of its position, and once more follow the course of the Ver. Passing along the carriage drive to Gorhambury I come presently to the few remaining ruins of the mansion which once afforded quiet



Old St. Michael's (St. Albans).

seclusion to one whom Pope has not very happily called "The wisest, brightest, meanest of mankind." It has been truly said that Pope was hardly the man to criticise Milton; he was certainly not the man to understand Francis Bacon. We know hardly anything of the life of the great philosopher at Gorhambury: the entrance porch, the most conspicuous relic of the old mansion which Queen Bess visited, tells but few tales. We read that Bacon came down here for a while when his troubles were at their height, and that a few days after his death his body was brought from Arundel House on Highgate Hill and buried in St. Michael's Church, where his monument is one of the glories of Hertfordshire. It is placed in a niche on the north side of the chancel. There the figure of Francis Bacon, in white marble, is seated in a high-backed chair; upon the head is a broad brimmed hat, around the neck a ruff. The body is attired in Chancellor's robe, trunk hose, and shoes with conspicuous rosettes. And so his own wishes were obeyed, for in his will he had written, "For my burial I desire it may be in St. Michael's Church, St. Albans; there was my mother buried, and it is the parish church of my mansion house of Gorhambury." Posterity, not satisfied with the *Novum Organum*, the *De Augmentis*, and the wholly unique *Essays*, has set about to prove that to the same pen we owe *Hamlet* and *Othello*. However this may be, I know that to Francis Bacon we owe that one prose sentence which more than any other has always seemed to me to epitomise the whole law and the prophets: "A man's nature runs either to herbs, or weeds; therefore let him seasonably water the one, and destroy the other."

Other great men "whom we knew," or seem to have known through their books, have wandered in the woods or loitered on the roadways around St. Albans. Many of us can remember, in that corner of the library at home, our copy of Doddridge's *Rise and Progress*—once so lovingly thumbed by our parents, now so seldom taken from its place. Or perhaps we still possess a copy of the *Memoirs of the Life Character and*

Writings, of the late Rev. Philip Doddridge, D.D., of Northampton, by Job Orton, bound in dark grey boards, with a portrait engraved by John Robertson. Some time during the year 1715 young Doddridge came to St. Albans to study at a private school kept by Nathaniel Wood, "a worthy and learned master." Assuredly he was an exemplary youth. Whilst at St. Albans he kept a diary, and set down an account of how he spent his time. He was a diligent reader, like many persons; he carefully meditated upon what he read, like very few. He used to walk in the fields here reading and thinking, and often called upon poor, ignorant cottagers, and read and talked to them. He would lend them books and give money to the needy, so it is no matter for surprise that he was greatly beloved in the neighbourhood. Chief among his many friends was Samuel Clark, "minister of the dissenting congregation," who encouraged his studies. From St. Albans, Philip Doddridge went to an academy at Kibworth, where he further cultivated that spirit of piety and love of knowledge which rendered him so greatly honoured in his day.

Were old Mandeville describing the next few miles of my ramblings he would perhaps mention that men may go to the town of Watford by the road that runneth through Park Street, where is a pleasant stream and a water-mill; and from thence they come into a land full of trees, which is called Bricket Wood, where are wild flowers in so great plenty that men gather as many as they will, yet there seemeth but a greater abundance. I might walk from Gorhambury to Watford by tangled footpaths and through devious ways, past the little hamlets of Potters Crouch and Winch Hill and Leavesden Green and thence into the main road from St. Albans; but the archæological interest prevails with me, and I retrace my steps to St. Michael's, and presently pass the spot where stood once a hospital for lepers. The hospital for leprous women I have already mentioned: this at St. Julian's was for men, and was founded by Abbot Geoffrey de Gorham early in the 12th

century. At Park Street—a straggling village about two miles from St. Albans—there is little to arrest the footsteps of the antiquarian; but local ornithologists boast that two black terns were once seen near their village and that a cormorant was shot here by a Mr. Gee. Birds of all sorts cater for my entertainment as I go upon my way this afternoon. The doves are uttering soft sentimentalities in the quiet woods; rooks are cawing in the high tree-tops; in hedge-row and coppice, as Dan Chaucer would say, "smale foules maken melodie" on every side. I love the words of the old ballad:

"In summer when the shaws be sheen
And leaves be large and long,
It is full merry in fair forest
To hear the small birds' song."

Summer, indeed, is not yet; but leaves are already large and green and birds sing blithely, and I reach the outskirts of Bricket Wood surprised that I have journeyed so far.

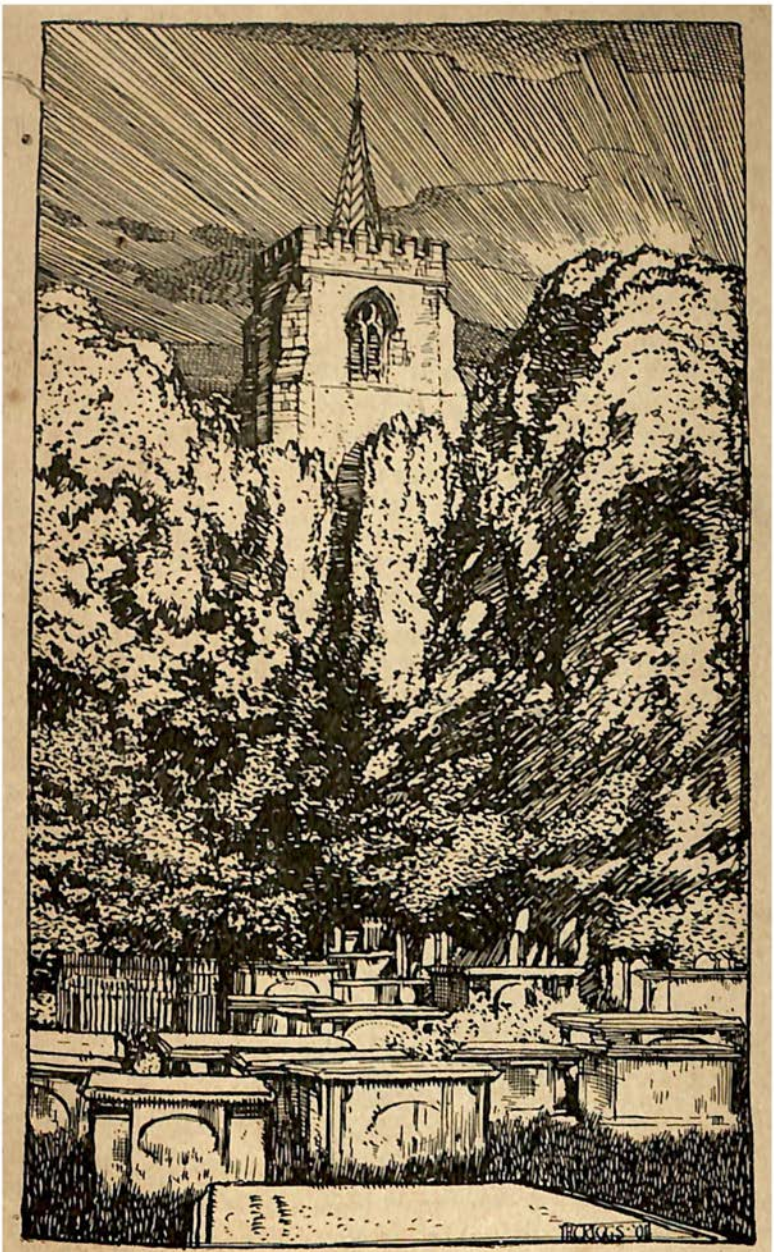
The historic records of this immediate neighbourhood are meagre; its natural beauty is undeniable. Gilbert White could have compiled an exceedingly interesting natural history of Bricket Wood, and Richard Jefferies, with those wonderful eyes of his, would have found daylong entertainment here. "It is a strange thing," wrote Bacon, "that in sea-voyages, where there is nothing to be seen but sky and sea, men should make diaries, but in land-travel, wherein so much is to be observed, for the most part they omit it, as if chance were fitter to be registered than observation." Bacon would hardly make a similar complaint were he writing in this year of grace 1901; for Châteaubriand, Heine, Thoreau, Borrow, Symonds, Stendhal, Gautier, and very many others, have done much to supply an omission which was doubtless prevalent when he penned his brief essay on "Travel." I am anxious to set down a few impressions before going towards Watford, so I rest awhile at the *Fox*, on the outskirts of the wood, pleased enough to watch the fine young goslings stroll hither and thither in the sunshine and

the children loitering before the inn, with primroses and stitchworts and kingcups in their hands. I can hear the *cok-cok* of a pheasant somewhere behind the piles of faggots not twenty yards away, despite the many thrushes who are calling *pretty Joey* as for a wager. Some weeks will elapse ere I see many butterflies, but a blue flutterer passes me at short intervals; small tortoiseshells, small whites, and a stray orange-tip complete the list. I have hardly taken note of these things when an old woman who has been gathering sticks in the wood pauses to rest her bundle on the ground, and as I look into her face I see that she must have attained to threescore years and ten, and has known her full share of labour and sorrow. Her face is so deeply furrowed that it looks as though cut out of oak, but her figure is still erect and her eyes bright and quick. She replies to my few questions civilly enough; I am much impressed by her apparent contentment with her lot in life. She needs little, as she says, to keep body and soul together, and evidently regards towns and cities as types of hell, for she speaks of the young men and maids who leave the villages to enter service in London as hopelessly gone astray into paths of foolishness. Dr. Johnson, who thought that the tide of life was at Charing Cross, and that the finest pastime in this world was to drive rapidly in a chaise with a pretty woman beside you, would hardly have shared the sentiments of this Goody Blake; but, as Mr. Rider Haggard is now trying to convince us, there are many reasons why the country folk *should* care a little more for the neighbourhood of grove and field, and why we should try to forewarn the villager that London is not exactly an El Dorado to every man that enters it. This old woman is no gossip, for after resting a few minutes she lifts her little faggot once again and goes towards her cottage, "most a mile away," with a firmness of tread which surprises me. So I, too, resume my journey, pleased to have had a chat with one of that class which, as Goldsmith wrote, "when once destroyed can never be supplied."

I can stay but an hour or two in Watford—the birthplace of Dr. Giles Fletcher, father to the great dramatist—so have been walking briskly from end to end of the High Street, and here and there turning into a byway in search of the picturesque, which I hardly find. Watford is a large and busy town: so large that I might spend a week in exploring it, and so busy that I should perhaps find but few to yarn with me. Of all towns in Hertfordshire, Watford has grown the most rapidly during the past thirty years; in 1871 the population of the Urban Sanitary district was 7,461, in 1881 it was 10,073. In 1882 the area of the district was enlarged from 530 to 871 acres, and so greatly has the town since increased that in 1891 the population numbered nearly 17,000; it is now nearly 30,000. Market folk in Watford should be honest in their dealings, for the figure of Justice with scales in her hand keeps watch near the Corn Exchange. At the north-west end of the High Street, near the pond, there stands a sign-post. The four arms of this sign-post are so well covered with information that I, at least, have never seen its equal; and I cannot refrain from copying all the distances set forth thereon, if only to encourage other towns to erect sign-boards of such exemplary completeness:—

St. Albans . . .	8 miles	King's Langley .	4 miles
Hatfield	14 „	Hemel Hempstead	8 „
Hertford . . .	20 „	Berkhampstead .	11 „
Rickmansworth .	3 „	Uxbridge . . .	11 „
Amersham . . .	11 „	High Wycombe .	17 „
Chesham . . .	12 „	Reading . . .	36 „
Stanmore . . .	5 „	Redbourn . . .	12 „
Edgware . . .	7 „	Markyate St. . .	16 „
London	15 „	Dunstable . . .	20 „

Watford was at one time included in the manor of Cashio, and was a part of the enormous property of the Abbey of St. Albans; but it "fell to the Crown" in 1549. There is no



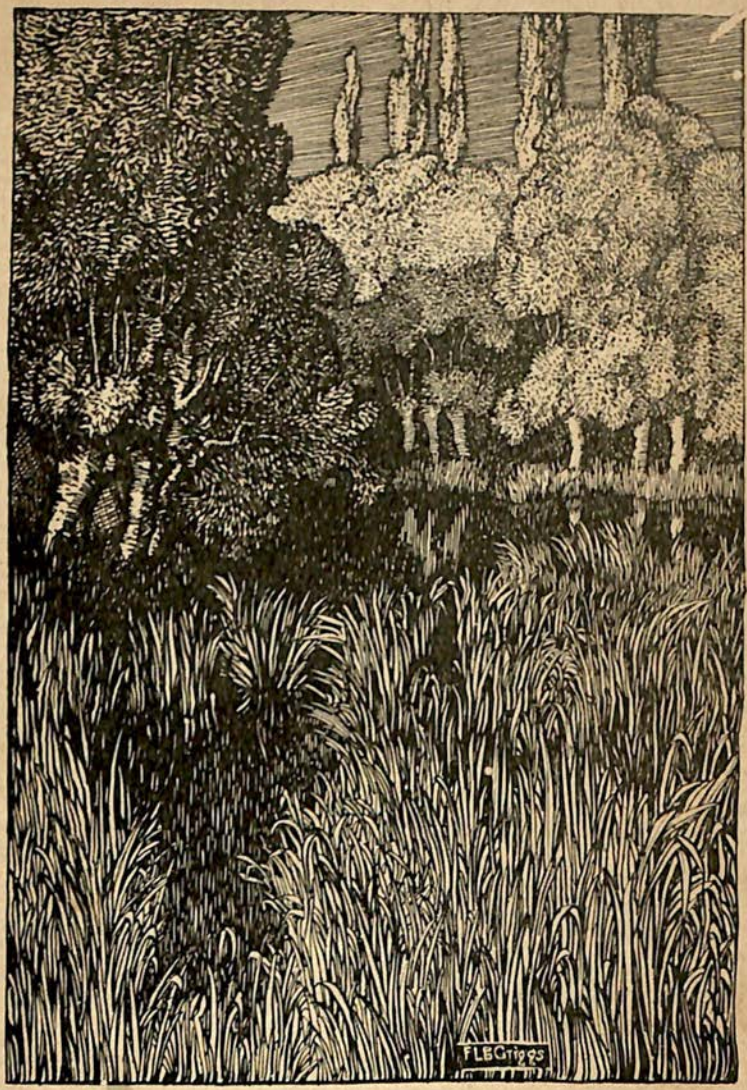
Watford.

market to-day, so I spend half an hour in and around the old church of St. Mary, which was restored, at a cost of £11,000, in 1871. It stands just off the High Street, in a tiny graveyard shaded by birch and lime and has a battlemented tower and wide nave. Many of the headstones are in a sorry state; few of the inscriptions on the older ones are legible. Of more interest in these days, when controversy upon matters educational is rife almost everywhere and the history of schools is widely studied, are the words cut in stone over the doorway of the old free school near the church. "*Anno Dm.* 1704. *This free school was built and endowed for the teaching of poor children at the proper cost of Mrs. Elizabeth Fuller of Watford Place the only daughter of Mr. John Comyne alias Chilcott of Tiverton in Devonshire and of London Merchant who dyed ye 11th of November* 1709 *aged* 65. *Silvester Chilcott Gent. Brother to the foundress of this school has made an addition of £20 a year for ever.*" This Silvester Chilcott died in 1716, and was very properly buried just outside the school which he "for ever" enriched.

After noting the fact that Robert Clutterbuck, author of the *History and Antiquities of the County of Hertford*, lies buried a few yards from the inscription which I have copied, I ramble to the foot of the hill, pass under the North Western Railway, climb the opposite steep and reach the village of Bushey—in reality a suburb of Watford. "This village," wrote Chauncy, "was aptly called by this name from the bushes and woods which heretofore did abound in this place." Bushey is pleasant enough to dwell in even now; it was studied and sketched by Turner; Professor Herkomer chose it as a fitting spot in which to found his School of Art. The latter artist, moreover, painted the well known picture of St. James's Church, with its graveyard sloping to the village pond. Here, too, the historian has something to tell us; for Silas Titus was born in Bushey in 1612, and in 1667 was buried in the vestry of the church. He was the reputed writer of the famous pamphlet entitled *Killing*

Murder; he was a Gentleman of the Bedchamber to King Charles II. and a Privy Councillor under the succeeding monarch. The mutilation of the Protector's body is said to have been suggested by Titus, whom Macaulay describes as a noted Presbyterian, a vehement exclusionist, and a manager of Stafford's Impeachment. Evelyn, in his diary, tells us that on one occasion he dined at the Lord Treasurer's with "Colonel Titus" and "many noblemen." Thomas Hearne, an antiquarian and artist of whom we know little, lies also in the churchyard.

The Earls of Essex have for many generations owned the beautiful and extensive property called Cassiobury Park, at the north-west end of Watford, which I pass on my way from Bushey to Rickmansworth. It was here that the Earl was arrested, in 1683, for his supposed share in the Rye House Plot. The House has had its ample share in the vicissitudes of fortune; the present structure was designed by James Wyatt, the fifth Earl having pulled down the previous one in the year 1800. To this latter Evelyn paid a visit during April in the year 1680, soon after its completion, and tells us that he passed a few days here very pleasantly. He drove down from the Earl's house in St. James's Square early on a Sunday morning, and seems to have kept his eyes open during his stay. The house had been erected by his friend Hugh May, and he calls it a "plaine fabric." He noticed the carvings by Gibbons; the painting of Apollo and the Liberal Arts in the porch, by Verrio; the one room parqueted with yew; the chimney-mantels of Irish marble and at the front of the house the bas-relief in Portland stone representing Diana hunting. He admired the library and the rich bindings of its volumes; but noted that it contained no MSS. save Journals and Rolls of Parliament. His notes concerning the estate are worth transcribing. "No man has been more industrious than this noble Lord in planting about his seate, adorn'd with walkes, ponds, and other rural elegancies; but the soil is stonie, churlish, and



Cashiobridge.

uneven, nor is the water neere enough to the house, tho' a very swift and cleare stream runs within a flight shot from it in the valley which may fitly be call'd Coldbrook, it being indeede excessive cold, yet producing faire troutes. 'Tis pitty the house was not situated to more advantage, but it seemes it was built just where the old one was, which I believe he onely meant to repaire; this leads men into irremediable errors, and it saves but a very little. The land about it is exceedingly addicted to wood, but the coldnesse of the place hinders the growth. Black cherry-trees prosper even to considerable timber, some being 80 foote long; they make also very handsome avenues. There is a pretty oval at the end of a faire walke, set about with treble rows of Spanish chestnut trees. The gardens are very rare, and cannot be otherwise, having so skilful an artist to govern them as Mr. Cooke, who is, as to the mechanic part, not ignorant in Mathematics, and pretends to Astrologie. There is an excellent collection of the choicest fruits." Evelyn might find matter for his diary at Cassiobury now, were he to revisit the spot, for the house that Wyatt built is a stately edifice. In the centre of the building is a courtyard: the entrance porch is on the west side, with a gallery, where hang family portraits. The house contains paintings by Rubens, Vandyck, Rembrandt, Teniers, Lely, Kneller, Reynolds, and many another master, and more than one library of choice books, some of exceeding value—"the books that never can be mine."

CHAPTER IV

RICKMANSWORTH, SARRATT, THE LANGLEYS

JULES DE GONCOURT, when writing to Louis Passy from Bas-sur-Seine, expressed the opinion that a river lined with trees is the prettiest sight in the world. Hawthorne, in an exquisite passage, described the beauty of the Concord River where it "bathes the overhanging boughs of elder bushes and willows or the roots of elms and ash trees and clumps of maple." These writers would surely have loved this corner of Hertfordshire: the town of Rickmansworth stands in a valley of streams. The Colne, the Gade, the Chess and the Grand Junction Canal thread their course through its immediate vicinity, and I can indulge my love of the riverside to the top of my bent to-day. As I stood outside the *Three Horse Shoes* in Church Street just now, I felt that I must get at once to the banks of these quiet waters; so I have wandered down to Batchworth Wharf, where the monkey barges are drawn up beside the towing path and a score of idlers are loitering upon the bridge. A few sand-martins are hawking hither and thither erratically as bats; a canary and a lark are singing by turns in their cages over the doorway of *The White Bear*, their voices hardly audible at times above the roar of the water at the lock. I am tempted to pursue the road a little farther and to climb the wooded hill towards Northwood, but forgo this at the sight of the Colne winding among the meadows on my right, and of the many willows,

some pollarded and some of natural growth, which seem to flourish exceedingly in this valley. So I stroll in this rich pasture-land awhile, enjoying the freshness of the morning air; now keeping beside the river or canal and now turning into some less trodden way,

> ". . . where this virgin brooklet silvers past,
> And yellowing either bank the kingcups blow."

Lot, lifting up his eyes and beholding the plain of Rickmansworth, would have chosen it without hesitation, leaving Abraham to appropriate another pasturage.

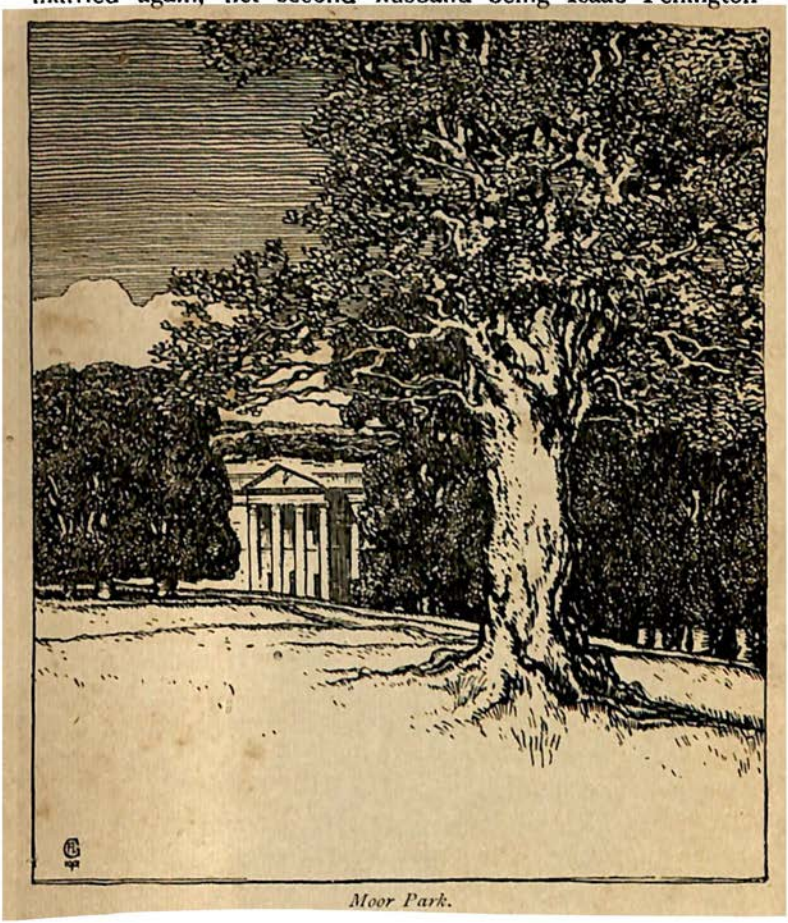
Rickmansworth seems redolent of wall-flowers this morning, turn where I may. They are in gardens, in window-boxes and flower-pots, in the churchyard, in the hands of children. I wander awhile among the side streets; cross the handbridge over the town "ditch" and come to the new Beresford Almshouses. Clumps of myosotis and yellow marguerite are in the well-trimmed beds before the doorways; but the larger masses of wallflowers are even more conspicuous. I pass on down Bury Lane and into the High Street. Here are more Almshouses, very old. The door of one stands half open; an old woman is sitting in the corner of her tidy parlour, looking out upon the street. She sits there daily, liking, as she tells me, to see people going about now that she cannot walk much herself. Her house, she says, is "more'n two 'undrid an' twenty yeer ole. You can see for yerself, sir, if you look at the stone; but you must look close-like, 'cause as the stone's most worned away." I find the stone just beneath the low roof: the old woman is right, for the Almshouses were given by the Lord of the Manor of Rickmansworth in 1680. I wonder whether their erection was prompted by simple generosity, or whether the Lord of the Manor, chastened in spirit by the appearance of the famous comet in that year, sought to ease his conscience by some good deed of charity? There is an extemporised theatre a little to the west of these houses, such a theatre as is

often utilised for the setting forth of that crude but didactic drama touching the tragic story of Maria Martin and the red barn. I am almost disappointed to learn from the posters that the play to be enacted to-morrow is styled *The Fire King, or the Days of the Roundheads and Cavaliers.*

Sir Walter Besant, in one of his novels, has written enthusiastically of the great number of beautiful homes in England. A home of imposing structure, and of beautiful surroundings is at Moor Park, immediately south-east from this little town of Rickmansworth—but, be it remembered, this is *not* the Moor Park where Sir William Temple died in 1699 and where Swift taught Stella Latin. The park was once the property of the abbots of St. Albans; it was given by Henry VII. to that Earl of Oxford who led the Tudor van at Bosworth Field, and in the time of Henry VIII. was owned by Wolsey. The old homestead stood almost on the same spot as the mansion now owned by Lord Ebury, and is supposed to have been built in the fifteenth century by Neville, Archbishop of York. It was once the property of the unfortunate Duke of Monmouth, in whose day it was almost entirely rebuilt. The widowed Duchess of Monmouth sold it to a man named Styles, who adorned it with a Corinthian portico and Tuscan colonnades, and employed Thornhill to paint the ceiling of the saloon. Styles is said to have expended £150,000 in altering and adorning his home. The whole estate is worthy of the mansion; the park is about five miles in circumference and is famous for its exquisitely diversified scenery and fine old beeches. Sir Robert Cary, afterwards Earl of Monmouth, who in his *Autobiography* tells how the young prince who afterwards became King Charles I. was entrusted into his keeping to be reared and educated, died at Moor Park and was buried at Rickmansworth. He was descended from the Carys of Cockington.

Early in the year 1672 William Penn, the Quaker, returned to England from his tour through Germany and Holland,

On the 4th of April he married Gulielma, daughter of Sir William Springett and Mary his wife, who, after his death, married again, her second husband being Isaac Penington

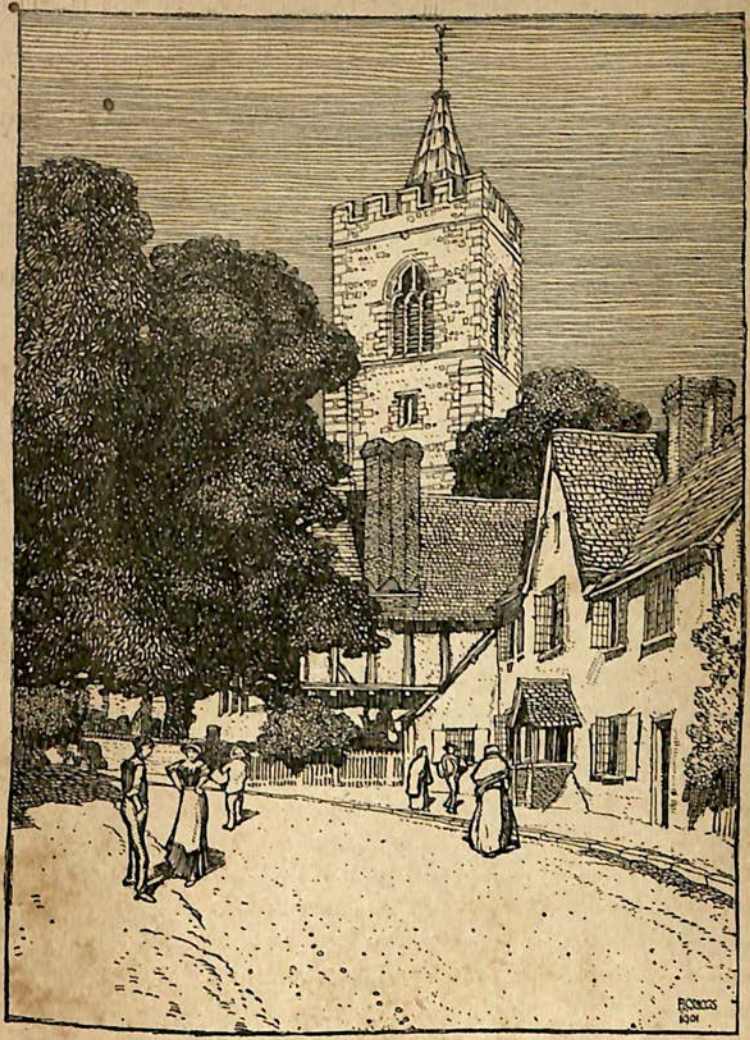


Moor Park.

of Chalfont Grange, the Quaker. Guli Springett, as she was called, was a young lady of great personal beauty and exemplary character. The wedding took place at Chorley Wood, a village about three miles from here, almost on

the border of Buckinghamshire. Penn brought his bride to Basing House at Rickmansworth, where he lived for about five years. Here, or at least during this period, he wrote, among other works, *Reasons against Railing* and *Counterfeit Christianity Detected*, and here, in 1675, he held a public disputation with Richard Baxter—a doughty disputant worthy of the Quaker's polemical skill. They argued on "order" and on "the light within" and both men claimed the victory. I cannot think that Penn was a match for that rare old theologian, a man of many folios and more contentions, who praised, and earned, "the saints' everlasting rest" before he entered into it. About two years afterwards Penn inherited Worminghurst in Sussex, and thither he removed his family. His beautiful wife died at Hoddesdon in February 1694, and her husband sought to mitigate his sorrow by writing his *Account of the Rise and Progress of the People called Quakers.* The lady who had thus long graced Rickmansworth with her presence, and who was greatly beloved, was buried at Jordans' meeting house near Chalfont St. Giles, that Buckinghamshire village of classic and revered memory, where, thirty years before, Thomas Ellwood had been tutor to the Peningtons and John Milton had sought a refuge from the plague in a neighbouring cottage. The village is only four miles south-west from Rickmansworth. Penn died at Ruscomb in Berkshire twenty-four years after the death of Gulielma, and was laid to rest by her side. Except that of Francis Bacon, there is probably no name of any Hertfordshire worthy so widely famous as that of William Penn.

There is another park to the north of Rickmansworth; so after listening to the town band—the town has recently aspired to musical honours—I seek the shade of its grand old chestnuts and walnuts, whose gnarled and twisted trunks are sufficient warrant for their antiquity. Many deer are in the open park; they seem to designedly spread out in a line and advance in one direction; but at times one lifts its head and looks around as though it scents some danger from afar. The swallows are



Rickmansworth.

flying so low over the buttercups in the foreground near the road that they almost knock the petals with their breasts. Tit-mice are at their antics among the tree-tops, and a pair of nut-hatches are running backwards and forwards upon a low branch of the walnut nearest the small white lodge. I do not crave for "a lodge in some vast wilderness," but am partial to a stroll in a pleasant park, especially on a bright morning; so I turn with some reluctance towards St. Mary's Church. Morning service is in progress as I walk around the fine old edifice, admiring its long nave with battlemented roof and low windows—so low that I am tempted to emulate Mr. Toots and to peer in upon the assembled congregation. The grave of Edward Hodgson, M.A., who was vicar of Rickmansworth for 49 years, and who died in 1853, is here; here, too, on the south side of the nave, is a tablet let into the brickwork of the wall. This tablet is to the memory of Mary Ricket, who died in 1732 aged 87; beneath it are the words *De mortuis nil nisi bonum.* The classical injunction is now hardly in danger of violation; but I smile at its sinister suggestiveness. Possibly the words were of private interpretation and more was meant than met the eye of a stranger. There is also in this graveyard a touching epitaph of unusual tenor: "*To the memory of John Powney a faithful servant and not unfaithful Christian who died or rather began to live June* 17, 1826. *This tomb is erected in token of posthumous regard by his master and friend.*"

It may be true enough that every man writes best with his own pen, but for a few days I should like to borrow the pen of a woman—George Sand. She knew and loved many villages in France; she would have loved many villages in England had she known them. How she would have portrayed the daily life at Sarratt, Bucks Hill, Hunton Bridge, Chipperfield, Bovingdon! Her rare and subtle genius, so marvellously

evinced in *Jeanne*, *Les Maîtres Sonneurs* and *La Mare au Diable*, would have enabled her to detect traits of character unnoticed by most had she sojourned in these villages with Maurice and Solange, and known their inhabitants as she knew the people of Nohant. But it is chiefly of those characteristics of George Sand so eloquently insisted upon by Matthew Arnold that I am thinking at the moment. "She gives us the wild flowers by their actual names—snowdrop, primrose, columbine, iris, scabious. The winding and deep lanes running out of the high road on either side, the fresh and calm spots they take us to . . . how delicious it all is!" They are winding and deep lanes down which I ramble this afternoon towards Sarratt. The view from the hill between the new cemetery and Quickly Green is of many miles of varied landscape, where fields are green with growing corn and the railroad winds between two sheer precipices, tree-crowned. Presently I peer down into a thickly wooded dell, where, among prostrate trunks, two wood-pigeons are walking in the chequered light that falls upon them through branches of beech whose leaves have now put on their choicest greenery. From here, indeed, the woods that shade the narrow road to Loudwater and Croxley Green are a study in colour. The lighter tints of the larch are shown in strong relief against the dark firs and still darker pines; in the garden of a mansion where the road twists round to a chalk pit stand the cedar and the copper-beech; wild hyacinths mingle their blue with the green of the farther fields. The warmer sunshine has now brought out the butterflies in greater numbers, and blues and orange-tips flutter down the hedge-rows among the wild parsley, the strawberries, the abundant stitch-worts, and "the little speedwell's darling blue." The nightingale has invaded every coppice. I have walked in England as much as most men, but have seldom heard the nightingale so frequently as during this ramble in south-west Hertfordshire. Other voices are not lacking; but that one voice

of unrivalled compass puts them all to silence, justifying Wotton's verse :—

> "You curious chanters of the wood,
> That warble forth dame Nature's lays,
> Thinking your voices understood
> By your weak accents ; what's your praise
> When Philomel her voice shall raise ? "

I have been sitting silently to watch one at his song ; for the broods will soon be hatched and the nightingale will sing no more.

The road to Sarratt Green twists and turns in a most surprising fashion, and before I reach the sign-post that tells me I am half a mile from Mickleford Green and one mile and a half from Sarratt I seem to have been walking towards all points of the compass. Moreover, the sun has been marching all day through cloudless heavens, and to one who has been on foot almost since sunrise its rays seem to beat down upon the dusty road with continually increasing heat. And yet I am walking in the merry month of May ! I wonder what the heat will be like upon highway and byway in midsummer, if the heavens continue as brass and rain comes not upon the earth ? The cyclist who has placed his machine against a gate and is lying at full length upon the grass has, he tells me, been asking the same question, but thinks such weather is too extraordinary to last. He is somewhat reticent and is, moreover, a stranger to the county, so I leave him to his post-prandial cogitations, and, mounting the long, white, winding road towards Mickleford Green, I turn presently to the left and in a few minutes reach the first house in Sarratt.

Now, so far as I am aware, neither Sarratt—which embraces a church and a dozen cottages—nor Sarratt Green, a much larger village that stretches on either side of a long common about half a mile from the church, figure very largely in the chronicles. And yet you may glean a few interesting facts about this neighbourhood. Once upon a time—in the year

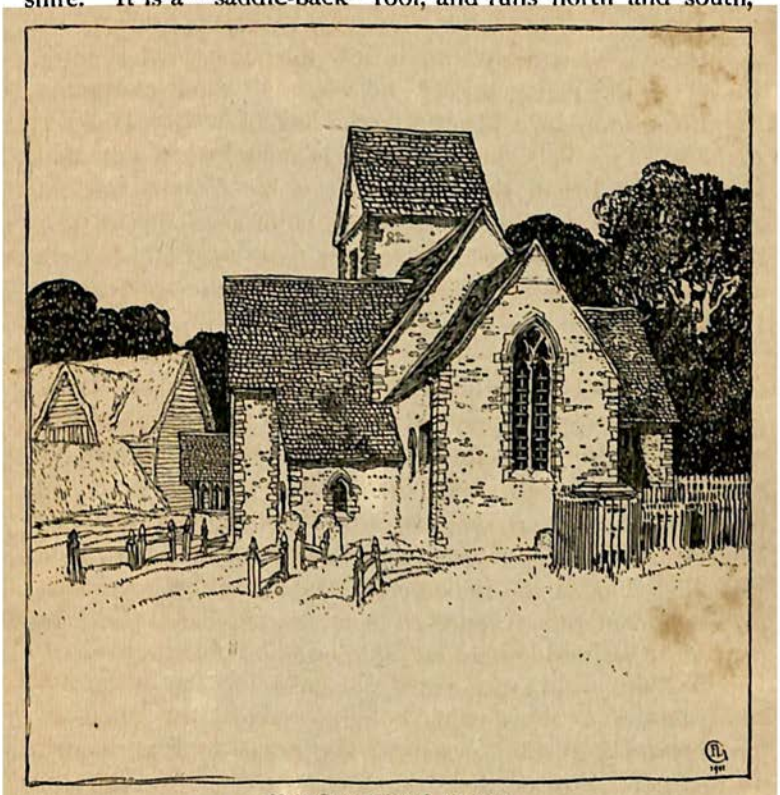
1506—the return of the rental of the Leper Hospital of St. Julian's, mentioned in my last chapter, showed that certain lands at Sarratt yielded to the hospital a rental of 13*s.* 4*d.* In those days there were more folk living near to the little Norman church but most of the inhabitants of the district live now at Sarratt Green. We read that Roman remains have been found here; that prior to the year 1560 the men and maids of Sarratt went perforce to St. Albans to be married, and that, at a later period, a stranger had but to deposit a handkerchief at the inn to enable him to claim the privileges of a resident and to be married in the village church. In the year 1706 a strange case of demoniacal possession in a family here was narrated by a writer named Aldridge. Anne, Rebecca, and Mary were three daughters of John Baldwin, of Sarratt. One day, during the year 1700, Rebecca, who had recently been ill, began to utter noises which resembled in turn a humble bee, a kitten, a cat, and a dog. Moreover, she had been subject to fits, and these now returned; she was wont to cry out "I'll burn ye," and was with difficulty prevented from throwing herself upon the fire. She became worse and worse, and in 1702 her sister Mary was smitten with fits of blindness and dumbness. Then they both began to see persons invisible to anybody else, and could only walk backwards, calling out at intervals, "Now we shall fall down." What is more singular, at such times they *did* fall down. These strange manifestations continued so long a time that at length John Baldwin called his friends together and prayer meetings were held at his house until the children were cured. But Anne now became possessed in her turn, and continued so until, in 1704, she also was cured at a prayer meeting. Richard Carter, who was present when Mary was healed, has recorded some curious circumstances attending that happy event. "In the time of prayer Mary Baldwin was taken very ill; and after prayer was over it was declared to me by her, and others who saw it, that towards the end of that day of prayer Mary was so ill that she

thought she should vomit and went out of the room (and her sister Rebecca went out with her) and Mary cast up (as she thought) a piece of flesh as big as a mouse, and she said then she see several of the appearances standing about it and her, and they said they could not meddle with her any more, and she said she thought the piece of flesh crawled away, and the appearances went away with it snivelling and crying." But where was the parish priest? and why were these evil spirits not driven away by a plentiful sprinkling of "Holy Water"? Perhaps they will be more speedily exorcised when next they visit Sarratt; for in the *Day Office of the Church* and the *Priest's Prayer Book*—both recently published—we are provided with explicit directions for the "casting out of devils and driving away of diseases" by the use of "Holy Water."

Sarratt should be one of the healthiest habitations in Hertfordshire. Most of the houses are detached, and there seems ample room for everything and everybody. The place affords as pleasing a contrast to the congested London suburb as heart can wish. The broad green common that stretches from end to end of the village is swept by a most delightful breeze, and I throw myself upon the cool turf, beside the drumhead well, with the feeling of the Indian chief who struck his spearhead in the ground at an approved spot, exclaiming "Here we rest!" It was said in old times that he who bought a home in Hertfordshire paid two years' purchase for the air; the youngsters who are chasing butterflies across the green, or throwing bread to the geese upon the pond, look as though disease never crossed their doorway. As you pass up the village, keeping the common on your left, you will notice that before the doorway of *The Old Boot* there stand four lime trees in a row, and that before *The Red Lion*, a few steps farther on, four lime trees stand "four square." The trees are of great age and several generations must have come and gone since the two neighbours, perhaps in a spirit of friendly

rivalry, planted these limes before their doorway and watched them grow.

Let me go down to the little Norman church. The tower has a roof unlike that of any other church tower in Hertfordshire. It is a "saddle-back" roof, and runs north and south,



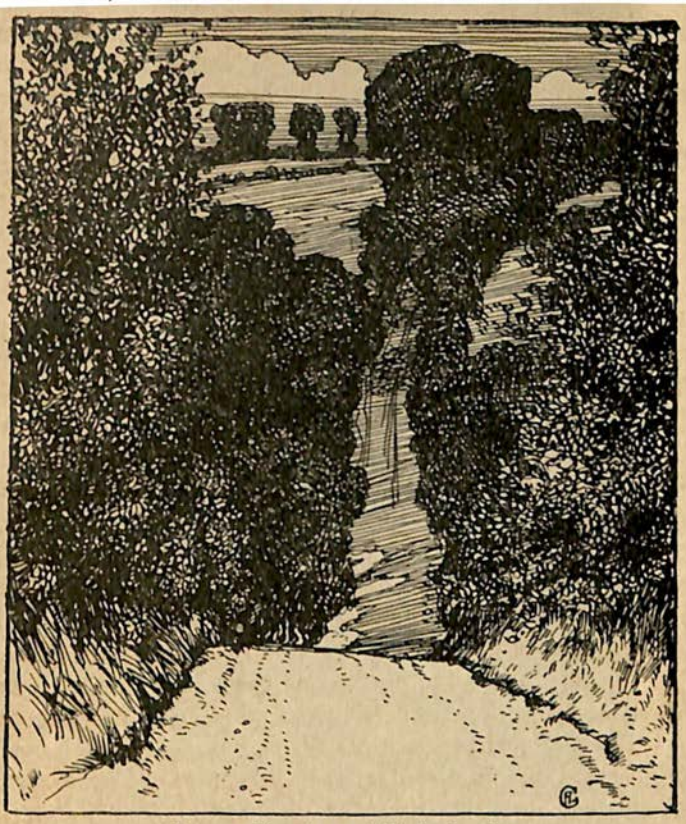
Holy Cross Church, Sarratt.

whereas the nave, as customary, runs east and west. I find the church door locked, but the old caretaker lives close by, in the almshouses founded by one of the Baldwins in 1550, and rebuilt by Mr. Ralph Day of Sarratt Hall in 1821. So to him I apply for admission and we enter the church together. On the

wall is a framed notice to the effect that "The Incorporated Society for Building, etc. Churches, granted £20 A.D. 1865 towards reseating and restoring this church." There are three bells; one tenor, weighing six hundredweight, bears the date 1719; another tenor, of five hundredweight, 1606; the treble, four hundredweight one quarter and seven pounds, 1865. These things are pointed out to me by my guide; but I am more interested in the small pulpit of carved oak, of Jacobean age. For Richard Baxter is said to have preached in this church, and from this pulpit. I will answer for it that few slumbered in their pews on that occasion, and that Baxter dealt as faithfully with the grand folk present as Knox dealt with Mary Queen of Scots. I fancy that sounding board and those delicately carved panels must have shaken long before the great divine came to his peroration, after having expounded "thirteenthly" and "very briefly" one of the minor doctrines of grace. His was probably a timely visit; for such churches as this have at times been sadly neglected. The ruins of Great Flaunden Church, a mile or too from Sarratt, have reminded many of this fact. We are told that there was at Great Flaunden no resident clergyman, and that a curate came over at intervals from Berkhampstead. On one occasion he had been absent longer than usual, and the caretaker refused to admit him to the church, because her goose was sitting in the pulpit and the eggs were expected to hatch out on the following Wednesday! On the left hand wall of the chancel my guide shows me a tablet to the memory of the Right Hon. Lady Frances Wade, a daughter of the sixth Marquis of Lothian, who died at Sarratt in 1863; and on the opposite wall a marble bas-relief representing a man and his wife on their knees in prayer. This man was William Kyngsley, Knight; and his memorial bears the date 1502.

When marking out my route I intended to walk from Sarratt to Hemel Hempstead as quickly as circumstances might permit, and thought to linger only at Bucks Hill and at Bovingdon. But I find so much of interest in these western

villages that I am determined to explore a few byways on either side of my route and thus see even more than I purposed. So after having lunch this morning at *The Rose and Crown* at Bucks Hill, a hamlet on the hillside two miles from Sarratt



Between Flaunden and King's Langley.

Green, where the young hostess shows me two Californian quails, shot by her father at Aldbury, near Tring, and a black headed tern shot on the Tring reservoir, I leave my proper path and stroll as far as to Hunton Bridge, passing Langleybury on the way. I may as well own that I visit Hunton

Bridge somewhat in the spirit of a pilgrim. Prior to August 1887 this little village could boast that it possessed its own Gilbert White. For ten years in succession Mr. John E. Littleboy furnished a report of birds observed in Hertfordshire. At the time of his last report, in 1887, he could claim that 201 species had been known to visit the county. He was especially delighted when any rare visitant strayed into the neighbourhood of Hunton Bridge. On one occasion he saw two hawfinches in his garden in the month of April; once he "observed a greater-spotted woodpecker on the branch of a tree between St. Albans and Leverstock Green"; at another time he reported "Mr. Simons of King's Langley, informs me that when driving along the road towards Hemel Hempstead in his cart on the 23rd of Sept. he knocked over with his whip a large gull. He carefully secured it, took it home with him, and endeavoured to keep it alive, but without success. It died the next day, and has been mounted by a Mr. Bowers of Watford. It proved to be a Herring gull" Hunton Bridge is one of the quietest villages I have ever entered; yet there is here a meeting of the ways. By one road you may enter from Bedmond or St. Albans; by another from Watford or Lady Capel's Wharf; by a third from Rickmansworth or Sarratt. The cottages beside the bridge over the Grand Junction Canal are covered thick with ivy and ampelopsis and jessamine, and some have tiny rustic porches. Near the west end of the village stands the modern church of Langleybury; the entrance to the churchyard is guarded by very finely built lych-gates; in the churchyard itself stands one of the most splendid private monuments in Hertfordshire. Standing, I suppose, full twenty feet high, it consists of a cross of white marble; the figure of Christ hangs upon the cross; at His feet are four panels with three of the apostles cut in relief on each. It is to the memory of William Jones Loyd of Langleybury and was erected by his eldest son. The church, a Decorated building of squared flint and bathstone, has a spire 130 feet

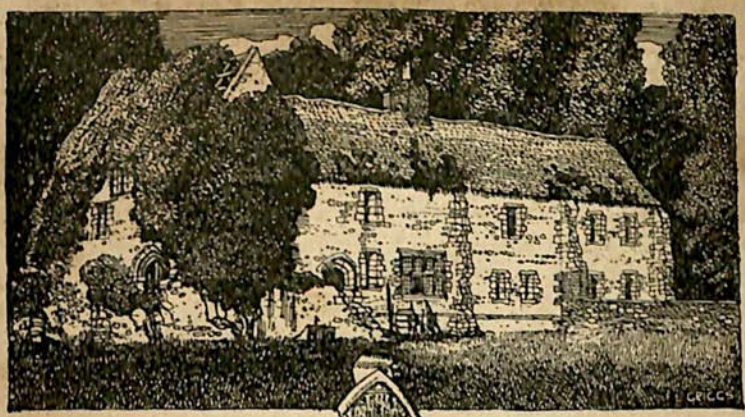
high. It was built and endowed by the late W. J. Loyd in 1864.

From Hunton Bridge my excursionary way leads me to the stile near the North Western Railway, thence across the clover fields to Gallows Hill, and past the Booksellers' Provident Retreat to King's Langley. Now in the eyes of many King's Langley is a village well known for the straw-plaiting and paper-making industries; to others it is chiefly famous by reason of its association with Piers Gaveston. That adventurous scrapegrace was the son of a Gascon knight. He was brought up in the household of Edward I., and was the playmate of the unfortunate Prince who afterwards became King. The friendship between the Prince and Gaveston was destined to give rise to much strife. Gaveston's conduct early became offensive, so offensive that at Lanercost, on 26th February, 1307, the King ordered his banishment. But presently "Longshanks" was gathered to his fathers, and Edward II. reigned—or pretended to reign—in his stead. The favourite was promptly recalled and loaded with gifts; it is even said that £50,000, once the property of the disgraced Bishop of Coventry, was seized at the New Temple and given to Gaveston, together with £100,000 from the treasure of the late King. Moreover, Edward made Gaveston guardian of the kingdom during his absence in France. Presently the friends were again together, and at Berkhampstead Castle, which also was bestowed upon him by the King, Piers Gaveston was married to Margaret de Clare, sister to the Earl of Gloucester and niece to Edward. The monarch graced the wedding with his presence and it is recorded that "he scattered silver pennies, to the amount of £7 10*s.* 6*d.* over the heads of the couple on entering the church." The favourite had perhaps the chance to have lived happily ever afterwards; but his influence became so mischievous that the enraged barons demanded his second banishment. The King, forced into apparent acquiescence, made his friend Lieutenant of Ireland, and when he soon

afterwards marched against the Scots the two life-long companions met again at Berwick. Edward had soon to retrace his steps and to face an angry Parliament, and Gaveston was lodged for safety in Bamborough Castle. Again the banishment of the obnoxious favourite was demanded and he was this time forbidden to enter Scotland, Ireland, Wales, or Gascony; but Gaveston was a man not readily disposed of. At Christmas, 1311, he again came to England secretly; but so strong was the feeling against him that he was compelled to hide, and move quietly from place to place. The end came at length. On 10th June, 1312, Piers Gaveston was taken prisoner by the Earl of Warwick at Deddington in Oxfordshire, and nine days afterwards was beheaded at Blacklow Hill or Gaversdike, near Warwick. For more than two years the Dominican Friars kept his body at Oxford, but this fraternity had a priory at King's Langley, founded in 1308 by Roger Helle, and thither the remains were removed by order of Edward II. on 2nd January, 1315. The King and Reynolds, Archbishop of Canterbury, were present at the funeral. One can hardly withhold pity for the fate of this adventurer on life's highway. He was certainly—to borrow a phrase from Mr. G. B. Burgin—one of "Fortune's Footballs." The fault of the spoilt child usually lies at other doors than his own—at the door of the spoiler. Who shall say how far Gaveston deserved his doom? The late Bishop Stubbs wrote of his "offensive personal behaviour"; one Baker of Swynebroke says, "he was nice in his manners and skilled in arms."

At this village of King's Langley, upon the high road from London to Berkhampstead, stood once a royal palace, a little westward from the church. Men whose names are writ large in history came often here, but they were hardly such as rule our spirits from their urns. It is, I believe, doubtful when the palace was first built; probably, during the reign of Henry III. There is no doubt that Edward I. once lived here for about four months—and declined to pay for the immense quantity of

food devoured by his followers; four or five years later he stayed here again with his second wife, Margaret, sister to Philip IV. of France. Edward II. was often here, and during his reign the Dominican Priory was built close to the palace. He is said to have lived in Langley Palace in the winter of 1314 when smarting from his recent defeat at Bannockburn. But a son of Edward III. has most claim upon my attention whilst I am in this village. On 5th June, 1341, Edmund, fifth son of that monarch, was born in the palace, within a few hundred yards of the farmhouse where I have been resting; his mother Philippa, as I mentioned in my last chapter, was churched at St. Alban's Abbey. The infant Edmund was baptised by Abbot Michael de Mentmore; there were great rejoicings and a tournament here in honour of the event. This Edmund de Langley became a very important person, not merely because his father created him Earl of Cambridge, and Richard II. created him Duke of York, but because he was the founder of the faction of the White Rose. There was a Christmas gathering here in 1392 when Richard II. was present, and four years



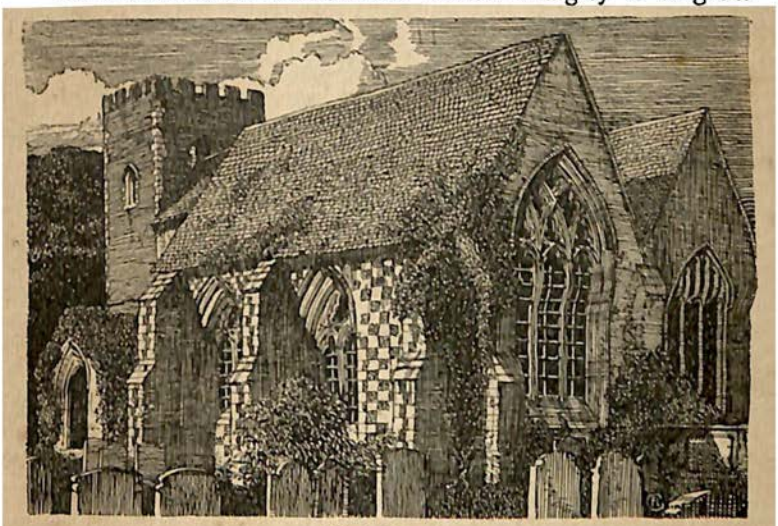
King's Langley Priory.

later the King was here again and old John of Gaunt was among the guests. Here too, during the Holy Week following his accession, came Henry V., and he it was who ordered the remains of Richard II., brought to the priory in 1400, to be removed to Westminster. You may still see the altar tomb of Edmund de Langley and his wife Isabel, a daughter of Pedro of Castille, in the parish church of All Saints: the remains were brought here after the dissolution of the priory. The arms of England, of France, and of Pedro of Castille were once conspicuous on shields upon the tomb, but are now defaced.

I must turn back, cross the railway, and look at Abbots Langley, for the two Langleys are as closely associated in Hertfordshire minds as Scylla and Charybdis. To mention one is to call the other to memory. So I walk back through King's Langley from end to end, and turning to the left, pass the Perpendicular parish church. A jackdaw is hovering over the square, embattled tower, and some boys, untroubled by thoughts of Piers Gaveston or Edmund de Langley, are at play upon the graves. I come presently to the village of Abbots Langley, lying high in a prettily wooded district above the river Gade. I wonder what it was like in the time of Edward the Confessor, when Egelwine the Black and his wife Wincelfled bestowed the property upon the rich abbot of St. Albans, and thus gave rise to its distinctive name. It was Nicholas Breakspear, born somewhere in the vicinity of the village at the close of the 11th century, who earned for Abbots Langley its claim to distinction. I have already alluded to his unsuccessful efforts to enter the monastery at St. Albans—which, as old Fuller puts it, "proved no mishap, but a happy miss unto him." The eventful life of the only Englishman who ever became Pope of Rome must be summarised in few words. He studied at Paris, entered the monastery of St. Rufus, in Provence, and became its abbot. His great knowledge of theology came to the ears of Pope Eugenius III.; he was

made Cardinal Bishop of Alba, and was at one time Papal Legate to Denmark and Norway. In November, 1154, he became Pope Adrian IV., and Henry II. sent the Abbot of St. Albans, Robert de Gorham, to congratulate him at Rome. It was Adrian IV. who ordered the execution of Arnold of Brescia; and during his pontificate Frederick Barbarossa was crowned at St. Peter's. He died at the ill-built town of Anagni in the province of Roma in the year 1159.

The church of St. Lawrence at Abbots Langley is of great



Abbots Langley.

antiquity, and portions of the structure are as old as the memory of Nicholas Breakspear. Most of the windows are Perpendicular, but those of the south aisle are Decorated; the tower, as at King's Langley, is square and embattled. In the nave are some fine old brasses, to the memory of Horwoldes and Cogdells, but the chief monument is that of Lord Chief Justice Raymond, who died in 1732.

* After a most enjoyable stroll across the little breezy Langley

Common, through narrow winding lanes, and beside fields of corn, I came back again just now into the road from Bucks Hill to Chipperfield. Here, close to an orchard where many beehives stand beneath the trees, I have been sitting down to make a few notes; to listen to the bees whose "mûrmuring small trumpets sounden wide," and to the yellow-hammer who is calling persistently for *a very very little bit of bread and no-oo cheese.* It is another grand stretch of common that I cross soon after resuming my way, where for an eternity forest trees and furze have fought for supremacy of the soil, and the great battle of evolution is still waging. A fine old manor house is at Chipperfield, so spacious and so inviting that you can hardly observe it and keep the tenth commandment. Forest and furze have been cleared by the hand of man from before the village, which skirts the common on the east and the north; at the west angle of the common stands the church, approached from the east through an avenue of limes, and from the north through some fine lych-gates. Those gates must possess a mournful interest in some eyes, for they bear a brass plate upon which the following words are inscribed: "*In memory of Captain George Clayton of H.M. 99th Regt. who died at Hong Kong August 19th 1863 aged twenty-four from wounds received while serving in the Chinese army under General Gordon. Erected by his surviving brothers.*" The church is built largely of flint and has no tower. Some of the oldest cottages in the village seem to be those at the northern end down by the Baptist Chapel and *The Royal Oak*—houses of equal importance in the eyes of their respective supporters. A gentleman who shows his appreciation of the tropical warmth by walking in his shirt-sleeves, and whose appearance is strongly suggestive of Mr. Richard Swiveller, tells me that the village of Chipperfield is well-known to certain patrons of the "fancy," and that "the common is just the place for a walk before breakfast with a weighted stick when you're getting in condition." I gather from his somewhat disjointed remarks

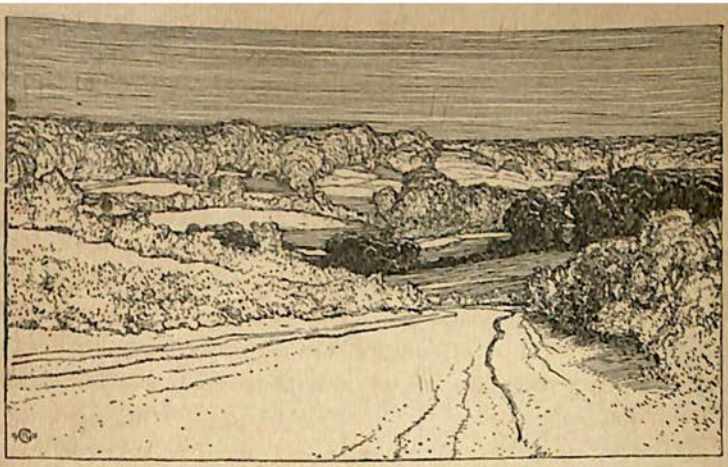
that promising young boxers are sent here to train, but, although loquacious enough, he is careful to mention no names either of houses or men. Our ways soon part, but not before I have impressed him visibly by stating that the "Coffee Cooler" was trained at Wheathampstead, and that I lived in the village at the time.

Between Chipperfield and Bovingdon I meet but three wayfarers; but I notice many grand old pines of wonderfully twisted growth, and a garden full of tulips so beautiful that Goldsmith would have pawned his peach-bloom coat to buy them for Uncle Antrobus.

If in these highways and byways in western Hertfordshire I fail to reap "the harvest of a quiet eye," the fault is surely my own. Here, or nowhere, I may cultivate the art of sauntering. I like that derivation which explains how the saunterer is the *Sainte-Terrer*, the pious pilgrim, the "Holy Lander," and choose to ignore the alternative derivation which tells me that he who saunters is *sans terre*, without house or home. I am confident that to saunter in a pretty district, where the mind is kept occupied but not excited, is the finest of all tonics. Emerson has said that the man who walks several miles to make a speech can hardly fail when he faces his audience; De Quincey was sure that young ladies would take longer walks in the country if they knew how the practice enhanced the beauty of their eyes. The diminutive, opium-eating moralist was a great walker himself and would have rejoiced to see such tall, strong, handsome young women as I meet in the long street of Bovingdon. The village lies scattered upon the slopes of two hills, the centre being in the deep between the two, and the church of St. Lawrence a few steps eastward from the main street. The most conspicuous object in the village is a well, now in disuse, with a pentagonal roof supported on pillars of timber. It was built to perpetuate the memory of the Honble. Granville D. Ryder, late of Westbrook Hay, near Bovingdon, who died in 1879. In the churchyard is the tomb of the Rt.

Honble. Richard Ryder, brother of Dudley Earl of Harrowby, who died in 1832. I trust the Ryders were all "honourable" men indeed, and served their day and generation before they fell on sleep. But I must take the road to Hemel Hempstead soon; so I bestow but a cursory glance upon the parish church, with its pinnacled tower and ivy-clad walls, and chat for a few moments with a little maid who has brought a handful of marsh marigolds to place on "Daddie's grave." A verse of merit superior to that of most verses on country headstones is inscribed over the grave of one Matthew Hobbs, a farmer of Bovingdon:—

"Some loving friend will drop a tear
On my dry bones, and say
These once were strong as mine appear
And mine must be as they;
Thus shall our mouldering members teach
What now our senses learn;
For dust and ashes loudest preach
Man's infinite concern."



Gryme's Dyke.

CHAPTER V

HEMEL HEMPSTEAD, BERKHAMPSTEAD

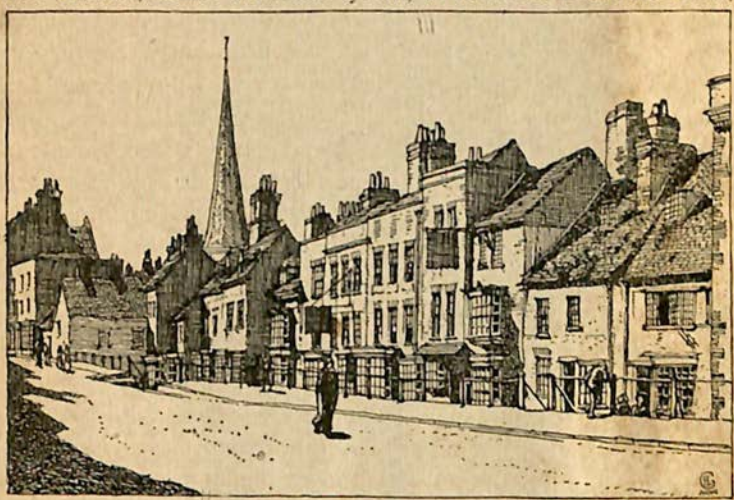
IT is a pleasant stroll through the suburban Marlowes to Hemel Hempstead. There is an abundance of wild flowers in trim gardens, unusual variety of cottage architecture, a high wooded ridge that shuts in the landscape upon the western side—and there is also a motor car. I wish people would refrain from naming rural highways and byways after London thoroughfares. I should like to enter this old town and climb its hilly High Street without passing Cornhill or Cheapside, especially as Hemel Hempstead, like Sion of old, is beautiful for situation. After sauntering through those streets of classic nomenclature, I turn to the left at the Posting House, go up Bury Hill, pass the *Jolly Drayman*, and, looking back, have a good view of the little town called by the Saxons *Hamelamestead*. Above is a sky "deeply, darkly, beautifully blue"; eastward from the town the hills are covered over with corn. People wishing to vegetate in the provinces might go very much farther and fare worse.

King Henry VIII. lifted up the light of his countenance

upon the inhabitants of Hemel Hempstead and gave a charter to their town. His portrait adorns the parochial seal. Here, as in other towns in Hertfordshire, paper is made, and there is a trade in corn and in straw plait—the latter, I am told, a fast dying industry. These last few days I have sometimes seen a woman or child plaiting before their cottage, but twenty years ago I met them everywhere, holding the short straws between their teeth, and plaiting deftly and swiftly as they talked. In those days the plait was woven thus by thousands of hands, and brought from almost every village and hamlet in the county to the larger centres and there "made up." Indeed, the centre of this industry in England has, for two hundred years, been in the counties of Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire, for wheat grown hereabouts yielded excellent straws, bright in colour and of great strength. Twenty years ago the yearly output of the English straw-plaiting trade was about £4,000,000, but even then foreign materials fought against the straw of the home counties and hats of palmetto fronds were made at St. Albans

Market day here is Thursday, when there are sales of fat and store stock. Yesterday was the annual Wool Fair. The parish is a "Bailiwick"; the high bailiff is elected annually, on St. Andrew's day, and there is, or was, a most praiseworthy custom of dispensing mulled port on that occasion at the expense of the new high bailiff. This evening the High Street is bright with colour as the promenade of a watering place, for it is Saturday and young ladies are finishing the week by a critical inspection of their neighbour's dresses. But the best of pleasures pall; presently the idlers of the High Street disperse to their homes and I seek the quiet precincts of the fine old church of St. Mary. Its tall, octagonal tower can be seen from a great distance; the plan of the church is cruciform, and the massive Norman pillars of the nave arcades seem fashioned for eternity rather than for time. The light of a ruddy sunset streams through the Decorated chancel windows, falls upon the agon-

ising figure on the altar crucifix, and casts a golden glow upon the groined roof. Outside there is a tablet bearing an inscription of exemplary conciseness: "Clarke Willshaw M.D. Obiit 14 die July 1771 Ætatis Suæ 67. *Multum dilectus. Multum desideratus.* After death the judgment." The western doorway is a grand old Norman structure, said to date from the middle of the twelfth century. What a story that rounded arch could tell! Perhaps some Saxon thrall sought sanctuary in this church, some Norman tyrant, a veritable Front-de-Bœuf,



High Street, Hemel Hempstead.

thundering meanwhile at the massive door and threatening speedy vengeance on any priestly knave who dared stand betwixt master and man. For eight hundred years it has stood sentinel at this entrance whilst twenty generations have worshipped in the church, "kneeling in prayer and not ashamed to pray." I wonder, too, what deeds were done in the subterranean passage leading from the church to an old house some distance off? The history of subterranean passages in all parts of England would make a diverting volume, but it would take the genius of a Dumas to set it forth.

A mower is whetting his scythe in a far corner of the churchyard. He is an old inhabitant of Hemel Hempstead, but knows nothing of any subterranean passage. He shows me a stone coffin outside the church on the south side—uncovered, so that I can see the place for the head to lie in, hewn out of the solid stone. Neither mower nor anybody else knows its story, so I ramble through the town to Piccotts End, cross the bridge over the little river Gade, and find myself in a noble park, where black cattle are browsing peacefully by the water-side and many swifts are wheeling and screaming above the chestnuts, firs and limes. At the other end of the park, "down where the shallower wave still tells its bubbling tales," some little girls are wading in the cool, rippling water, to the consternation of immense numbers of sticklebacks. This is Gadesbridge Park, the home of Sir Astley Paston Paston Cooper, Bart., and that renowned surgeon, the late Sir Astley Paston Cooper, has his monument in the church.

Twenty years ago two stormy petrels were picked up dead in a field near Hemel Hempstead, "blown across land," as Mr. Littleboy thought, "by the extreme violence of the December gales." Birds of many species have been known to visit this western part of the county. The Rev. W. Tyrwhitt Drake once recorded that a pair of whooper swans frequented Water End near Great Gaddesden; these birds are common enough in Norfolk, but from Broadland to West Hertfordshire is, ornithologically speaking, a far cry. The hoopoe has likewise been observed at Great Gaddesden; Mr. H. Wyman once saw a flock of snow-buntings among some hawthorns here at Hemel Hempstead. Tring, by reason of its reservoirs, is visited by birds rarely if ever seen elsewhere in the county. The great northern diver has been noticed upon those waters; there the crested grebe has laid her young; there the cormorant and sheldrake have rested after long, laborious flight from the coast. At Tring, too, that rare autumnal visitant to our islands, the great grey shrike, has been observed in October.

Before setting out for Berkhampstead, I must write a few words about one whom old Fuller calls "that learned divine whose memory smelleth like a field which the Lord hath blest." Dr. Richard Field was born in this town of Hemel Hempstead on 15th October, 1561—the year of the birth of Bacon—and studied at Berkhampstead Grammar School. He studied to rare purpose, and was so highly esteemed by King James I., who called him a "field for God to dwell in," that he once disputed before that monarch the knotty question "whether saints and angels know the years of man," and at another time went at the King's desire into Germany to reconcile the Calvinists with the Lutherans—about as hopeless a mission as man could well undertake. He established a more enduring title to fame when his *magnum opus* was published, "Of the Church, Five Books by Richard Field, Doctor of Divinity; at London imprinted by Humfrey Lownes for Simon Waterson 1606." Field's biographers speak of this work as one of the grandest monuments of polemical divinity in the language, and even liken it to the *Ecclesiastical Polity;* but I doubt whether *Of the Church* is read much now. We cannot find time to peruse such ponderous works in these days, much less to write them. The curious may find something about Field's profound learning and wonderful memory—he was a perfect Macaulay or Magliabecchi—in the *Athenæ* of Anthony Wood, and it may interest them to know that he was a friend of Hooker, a chaplain to James I. and Dean of Gloucester. He was buried in the outer chapel of St. George's, Windsor.

I cross Gadesbridge Park early in the morning, and find that a very steep hill leads to the pretty, ivy-clad farmhouse at its summit. Rain fell heavily last night; the wind roars now through the swaying trees, and the chickens in the road are blown sideways, to their great discomfiture. But the sun shines brightly, too. It shines upon green field and light brown road, still wet from last night's rain; upon ricks of

golden straw; upon the spire of St. Mary's Church away there in the valley far below; upon lichen-covered branches cut and stacked near the gateway of the farm. The fragrance of new hay is in the air—it was a-making while sickness kept me at home recently, and is now all gathered. The breeze, sweeping over the wheat fields farther west, makes light green troubled seas from hedge to hedge. Poppies stand like armies in the corn; thousands of wild roses are in bloom on every side. By the wayside blow wild parsleys, tall and strong; and honeysuckle is bursting into flower. My way to Berkhampstead leads me through a land of lanes; so narrow, so tortuous is this network of paths that I lose my whereabouts, but am quite content to saunter anywhere among such "bowery loveliness," to listen to the doves, and to blunder presently into the King's highway.

My first resting stage is reached when I cross the bridge over the Bulbourne, and the canal at the hamlet of Bourne End. Here I may refresh myself at the coffee tavern or at the *Three Horse Shoes*, according to taste, and can watch the monkey barges creeping lazily towards the lock from Berkhampstead or Boxmoor. I do not know whether my weakness is shared by other peregrinators, but sometimes, on reaching a little hamlet like this, I become the prey of an irresistible desire to go no further, but to purchase what Coleridge calls "a cottage with a double coach house" and live at ease for ever. At such times I fancy myself, Thoreau-like, sitting before my doorway from morn to dewy eve watching the landscape shimmer and twinkle in the heat, or planning an epic on Hertfordshire which shall rival *Paradise Lost*. But from my dream of rustic life I am recalled to its realities. Leaning against a gateway is an old, infirm man, with whom I have a short chat. He seems, like the hermit in the ballad, to "want but little here below, nor want that little long." There is quaintness and urbanity in his speech, so much so that I jot down a few of his remarks *verbatim*, a process of which he

fully approves. "I've lived 'ere some time, maybe a matter of ten year. I'm 'ard of 'earing and don't allus make out th' words, like, when I'm spoke to, sir. No, I don't justly remember when my 'ole woman died. W'en she was alive I 'ad no trouble like with anythink, for she was a good 'un, she was —I warrant you don't find no better now, atween 'ere an' Lunnon. What did she die of? I don't justly know; doctor said as ther' was a cancer; anyways, ther' worn't no chance for 'er long afore she died. . . . 'Ow do I manage? I gets a few shillen a week from the parish, an' gives a shillen to the woman as looks after me, an' pays for me room, so I don't go in no public 'ouses, for ther's no money for beer nor bacca. . . . Yes, it's quiet 'ere, an' it most generally is. We farm a few ship, an' ther's turmuts, an' wit, an' 'ay, an' such-like. . . . That's our church right afor yer; ther's no service a Sunday mornin's, an' the young 'uns all go to school." The old man's speech is of a kind common in several counties: had he lived in West Herts all his life the foregoing sentences would hardly do justice either to his idiom or his diction.

I am fairly in the West Herts valley now. That valley stretches from Hemel Hempstead to Tring, and is crossed from end to end by the North Western Railway and the Grand Junction Canal on the way from London to Birmingham. The historic interest of the district centres around Berkhampstead, and I shall find much food for reflection there, but on my way thither I pass a farm called Broadway. On this farm were grown the first red clover and Swede turnips ever cultivated in England; but it has a further claim to notice, bringing to mind a remarkable story.

Nearly fifty years ago there was exhibited at a lecture delivered at Berkhampstead a collar of leather, having a brass rim. On that collar were the following words—"Peter the wild man from Hanover. Whoever will bring him to Mr. Fenn at Berkhamsted, Hertfordshire, shall be paid for their trouble." In July 1725 the wearer of that collar was found in a field by

Jurgen Meyer of Hamelin in Hanover. He was black haired, brown skinned and naked save for a tattered shirt. The Burgomaster sent him to a neighbouring hospital. He proved harmless enough, but could never be taught to speak. His story came to the ears of George I., and at the wish of the then Princess of Wales he was brought to England. Dr. Arbuthnot found "Peter" a confirmed idiot and he was handed over to the care of a Mrs. Tichborne. By this lady Peter, the wild boy, was placed in a farmhouse at Haxter End, and then here at Broadway Farm. Peter was ever wild and a rover of the woods; his master, after once losing him for a time, placed round his neck the collar I have mentioned. Here he was visited by Lord Monboddo, who must have found him an interesting subject of study. He was not deformed; but "two fingers of his left hand were webbed up to the middle joint." At the time of his death, in 1785, he was believed to be 72 years of age; but this was only guessed from his apparent age when found in Hanover. Readers may remember that Peter, the wild boy, is mentioned in Paley's *Moral and Political Philosophy*.

"Berkhamstede is one of the best markette townes in Hertfordeshire and hath a large strete metely well builded from the north to the south, and another, but sumwhat lesser, from the west to the east, where the ryver rennith. The church is yn the middle of the town. In the bottom of the ryver on eche side be very faire meadowes." In these words Master John Leland, the "King's antiquary," described the town of Great Berkhampstead, which he visited on his way from the Chiltern Hills—"baren, woody, and ferne ground for the most parte"—to Chenies in Buckinghamshire. That Leland saw in Berkhampstead much that was pleasant to the eye and more that appealed to his antiquarian predilections I can well believe. The men of this town need not to boast of its antiquity, for it is known to all men. Dr. Stukeley tells us that it stands on the site of Durocobrivis, "the city of the marshy stream"; other places have disputed for this honour, but I ignore them

all. A very marshy stream that must have been which flowed in this valley centuries before Roman legionaries marched along Akeman Street and here, as everywhere, made their presence felt. It may be that prehistoric man lived in this valley in truly lacustrine fashion and shaped for himself, as in the recently discovered marsh village of Glastonbury, a home on sunken piles. But I must be content to leave such investigations to Sir John Evans, who at his residence at Nash Mills, a few miles from here, has a collection of flint implements and coins calculated to evoke undying envy in the breast of less fortunate archæologists.

I turn from the quicksands of conjecture to the firmer ground of history. I suppose the tide of civilisation set in here in earnest after St. Paul had visited these parts and rid them of snakes for ever, and the builders of Gryme's Dyke had disappeared. I take the story of St. Paul *cum grano salis*, but is not Gryme's Dyke still to be traced as you walk across Berkhampstead Common towards Frithsden? The grass-topped, irregular mound may be seen by all who look for it; but even Jonathan Oldbuck might hesitate as to whether Gryme's Dyke was, or was not, an earthwork thrown up by Celtic bands as a protection from Belgic invaders. But I am doubtless on safe ground when I turn to John Norden's *Speculum Britanniæ, the first parte: an Historical and Chorographicall Description of Middlesex and Hartfordshire*; for it is likely enough that, as Norden says, the Saxons called this place Berghamstedt because of its position as *villa sita inter montes*. Yonder are the hills, and here is the town, so let me get down into its streets without further preamble.

From the east end of Great Berkhampstead to the west end of Northchurch—where the parents of Maria Edgeworth lived a century and a quarter ago—is one long street of shops and residences. The Grammar School, founded by Dr. John Incent, stands in Castle Street, at the north side of the church of St. Peter; the rectory is not far off; at the south side of

the High Street are the old almhouses, "the guift of John Sayer Esq. 1684," near Cowper Road. The castle stood close to where the railroad runs, immediately east from the station, and portions of its ruins may still be seen from the train. Its partly double, partly triple moats are to-day choked with nettles, or deep in dead leaves as the brooks in Vallombrosa. Here and there a massive fragment of ivy-covered wall peeps between ash or beech, and such fragments are all that remain of the famous fortress. It is easy to understand how, framed in such stone-work and girded by such moats, our old castles could long withstand such tremendous onslaughts, if only food proved sufficient. But there, often enough, was the rub! The more numerous the defenders, the more need of victuals, and even Saxon and Norman castles had a limit to their store. I have been lying on the mound between the moats, listening to the sough of the wind among the beeches and the song of a wren on the ruined wall; watching the white clouds sail by like "ships upon the sea," and thinking of the oddly sorted company of men whose names are associated with the story of this castle. Only last Saturday the members of an archæological society visited the ruins of this famous stronghold, and must surely have anticipated many of my thoughts to-day.

When standing by the ruins of Hertford Castle I felt that I was treading upon the dust of heroes; what must I say on the site of the old castle of Berkhampstead? If, in the pageantry of dreams, the men who sojourned within these walls could pass before me as the men of Imperial Rome passed before De Quincey in the visions of the night, what a panorama they would present! Mercian Kings lived at "Berghamstedt" when it was a part of the kingdom of Mercia, but I dismiss them from my thoughts, hardly discernible through the mist of so many centuries. Camden tells us that Robert Earl of Moreton, who possessed 793 manors, built a castle at Berkhampstead, and Domesday Book records that the manor belonged to this brother of William of Normandy. Now, although

Domesday was published in two volumes in 1783, and has more recently been issued in parts under the supervision of Mr. W. B. Sanders of the Public Record Office, it is not every man's book, so I turn for the reference to Chauncy's *Historical Antiquities of Hertfordshire*: "Earl Moreton had Berchamstede in Treung hundred, it was rated for thirteen hides. . . Here is a presbyter or priest with fourteen villains and fifteen bordars [1] having twelve carucates,[2] and now eight more may be made; there are six servants and a certain ditcher had half an hide and Ralph a servant of the Earl one virgate. In the borough of this vill are two and fifty burgesses who pay four pounds a year for toll and they have half an hide and two mills of twenty shillings rent by the year: and there are two arpends of vineyard, meadow eight carucates, common of pasture for the cattle of the vill, wood to feed a thousand hogs and five shillings rent by the year. In the whole value it is worth sixteen pounds; when he received it twenty pounds; in the time of King Edward (the Confessor) four and twenty pounds: Edmar a thane of Earl Harold held this manor." (So far back go the records of agricultural depression.) In the reign of Henry I. the castle was destroyed, but soon afterwards rebuilt by Randulphus, the King's Chancellor. Randulphus enjoyed his fortress but a brief while. The King came over from Dunstable to see the new castle. The party had reached the hill-top and were looking towards the new building, when Randulphus fell from his horse; a monk rode over his prostrate body and he died soon afterwards. Henry II. stayed here when the castle was kept by Thomas à Becket, and after that prelate's death King John bestowed the castle upon his bride Isabella. Then it passed into the hands of the Earls of Essex. In the year 1216 Prince Louis of France, after leading the barons against Hertford Castle, as mentioned in my first chapter, marched towards Berkhampstead with a large army and captured the fortress after a long and desperate resistance. Matthew Paris narrates that on one occa-

[1] A cottager renting land. [2] A portion of land.

sion during this siege a body of men rushed from the castle, captured the provisions and chariots of Louis, and carried back into their stronghold the banner of William Earl Mandeville. That day, whilst the barons were at dinner, the besieged sallied out once more, bearing the stolen banner, dispersed many of those in the camp, disarmed some of the barons, and returned again in triumph to the castle. After its capture by the barons the castle knew many owners. Henry III. gave it to his brother Richard Earl of Cornwall, who died here in 1272; it was this Earl who obtained for Berkhampstead the grant to hold a fair. Edward, the long-legged King, Piers Gaveston, the troubler of England's peace, William Montacute, John de la Haye, Edward III., and the Black Prince were here successively: "Henry of Berkhampstead," was marshal to the Black Prince and fought at the battle of Cressy. In the reign of Richard II. Chaucer lived in the castle as clerk of the works. Henrys IV., V. and VI. held the castle in turn, and then it gradually fell into decay—so much so that Leland speaks of it as in ruins, and Sir Edward Cary, to whom it belonged in the days of good Queen Bess, preferred to reside in a house which he built—partly, it is said, from the castle ruins—on the top of the hill.

More important than any of the incidents I have mentioned is the story of William the Conqueror and his doings here. Not long after the battle of Hastings the great Norman warrior marched inland; he crossed Berkshire, and, fording the Thames at Wallingford, passed the Chiltern Hills and advanced towards Berkhampstead. Here he received the subjection of Edgar Atheling, Ealdred Archbishop of York, Wulfstein Bishop of Worcester, and many others, and from here he made his march to Westminster, and was there crowned King by Ealdred. Then William resolved to go down to St. Albans, where Abbot Frederic was known to be refractory to Norman claims; but the abbot heard of his approach and by causing trees to be felled and flung across the roads, seems to have

effectually thwarted the designs of the new King. So William came again to Berkhampstead and invited the abbot to meet him here. The abbot came, nothing daunted, bringing with him, as abbots were wont to do, some sacred relics. Upon these relics William, conciliatory enough when he deemed it diplomatic to be so, swore to respect the existing laws of the Saxon realm. Lanfranc was present on this occasion, as were also many Norman nobles; but the fact that this compact was not made in a corner did not prevent the Conqueror from violating its provisions almost immediately. William and the abbot presently quarrelled, and Frederic retired to the isle of Ely, where he "died in great vexation of heart." According to Speed, in his *History of Great Britain*, the abbot had plotted with Earls Edwin and Morcar to reinstate Edgar Atheling, the heir to the Saxon throne, so William could hardly have rested in peace until so bold a monk was placed where he could do no harm. In an illuminated Cottonian manuscript there is a picture of Abbot Frederic on horseback, with his hand raised as if in benediction on the church from which he is riding.

Southey, after referring to the historic associations of Berkhampstead, writes, "this little town will be more known in after ages as the birthplace of Cowper than for its connection with so many historical personages who figured in the tragedies of old." The poet was born in the old rectory in 1731, his father, John Cowper, chaplain to George II., having been rector of St. Peter's since 1722. John Cowper entered his son's baptism in the parish register, "1731 *Decbr. ye* 13 *Willm. ye son of John Cowper D.D. rector of this parish and Anne his wife, was baptised.*" I like to think of the prince of letter writers as a Hertfordshire man, but the greater part of his life was passed elsewhere, and his connection with the county was little more than one of birth. The school to which he was sent at six years of age was kept by a Dr. Pitman at Market Street, a village almost on the confines of Bedfordshire—indeed,

Cowper himself speaks of it as being in that county, although it is really in Hertfordshire. The sensitive young poet seems to have suffered much persecution at this school. "Here," he wrote, "I had hardships of various kinds to conflict with which I felt more sensibly in proportion to the tenderness with which I had been treated at home. But my chief affliction consisted in being singled out from the other boys, by a lad of about

Cowper's Birthplace, Berkhampstead St. Mary.

fifteen years of age, as a proper object upon whom he might let loose the cruelty of his temper. I choose to conceal a particular recital of the many acts of barbarity with which he made it his business continually to persecute me. It will be sufficient to say, that his savage treatment of me impressed such a dread of his figure upon my mind, that I well remember being afraid to lift my eyes upon him higher than his knees, and that I knew him better by his shoe buckles than by any

other part of his dress." He then adds, in characteristic phraseology, "May the Lord pardon him, and may we meet in glory!" The story of Cowper's life belongs to other books than this, and if you would seek the poet's grave you must follow Mr. Dutt into East Anglia. In the course of his tour in Norfolk, Mr. Dutt visited East Dereham and thought of Cowper when at Dereham Church, for the poet was buried there in the year 1800.

"The tenderness with which I had been treated at home." The mother of Cowper is known to have been a cultured and eminently lovable and loving lady: he lost that mother before he went to school. She was descended by four different lines from Henry III., King of England. I think of her sometimes as she appears in a small engraving from the picture by Hiens, with her hair in ringlets upon her shoulders, her eyes large and bright, her mouth small but firm. Many years after her death Cowper, on receiving her picture, enshrined her memory in imperishable verse. When nearing the end of his life he declared that hardly a day passed in which he did not think of her, although he had known her love for so short a time. She was buried here at Berkhampstead, in the chancel of the church where her husband was wont to preach; the inscription upon her monument was penned by her niece, who became Lady Walsingham:

"Here lies, in early years bereft of life,
The best of mothers and the kindest wife;
Who neither knew nor practised any art,
Secure in all she wished, her husband's heart.
Her love to him, still prevalent in death,
Pray'd Heaven to bless him with her latest breath.

"Still was she studious never to offend;
And glad of an occasion to commend.
With ease would pardon injuries received,
Nor e'er was cheerful when another grieved:
Despising state, with her own lot content,
Enjoyed the comforts of a life well spent;

Resigned, when Heaven demanded back her breath,
Her mind heroic 'midst the pangs of death.

"Whoe'er thou art, that dost this tomb draw near,
O stay awhile, and shed a friendly tear!
These lines, though weak, are as herself, sincere."

There! I have written or copied as much about the mother as the poet; but let it pass. The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world. She may know and rejoice in the fact that her son became one of those who, as Shelley puts it in his beautiful *Adonais*, "of the past are all that cannot pass away." Buried within the walls of these churches in Hertfordshire, as elsewhere, lie many who spent their lives in quarrels and warfare. They are mostly forgotten, despite the brasses on chancel wall or aisle floor: for they left no legacy of worth to elicit praise or thankfulness. The gentle poet's memorial is written on a monument more durable.

Even the idiot's memory, if his singularity be notable enough, outlasts the fighter's. The church of St. Mary at Northchurch is visited by many persons, not only because it has fine windows of stained glass, but because on the south side of the nave there is a brass tablet on the wall to the memory of Peter the Wild Boy. The inscription tells us little beyond the facts related some few pages back, but it is surmounted by a portrait graven in the brass after Bartolozzi. In that portrait some folk can discern a resemblance to Socrates. Another brass in the chancel commemorates John Hobart Culme-Seymour, Baronet, who was rector of Northchurch for fifty years, and beneath the beautifully tiled chancel floor lies the "*Rev. Samuel Noyess D.D. Rector of this parish for thirty-two years and Prebendary of Winchester.*" He died in 1740. Yet these good men, notable enough most likely in their day, are of less interest now than Peter. The church was enlarged and restored twenty years ago, and a notice at the south end of the nave states that all the seats are for the "free use of the parishioners according to law." Like the majority of old churches in England, this at

Northchurch deserves much more careful inspection than I can give it, and is worth sketching for the sake of its unusually low but massive embattled tower.

A steep hill, well shaded by larch and beech, leads me towards the village of Wigginton near Tring. Turning to the left presently instead of keeping straight on into the town, I find myself clambering up a perfect precipice, a veritable Spion Kop, washed bare by recent rain. Long before I am half way to the top I feel no small desire for the wings of a dove; but once fairly at the summit my first thought is of gratitude to the good angel who prompted the ascent. I would not have remained at the bottom among meaner minds for a king's ransom; for here, on a spur of the Chiltern Hills, the villagers of Wigginton can look upon one of the finest prospects in the county. To-day this prospect is clear to the uttermost horizon. To the north-east are the green heights of Ashridge, crowned by the Aldbury monument; southward, in the foreground, lies *Champneys*, an ideal homestead, with Tring Common and the varied greenery of Buckinghamshire in the farther distance. I can see, too, a train winding into the Northchurch tunnel; beyond is Berkhampstead, wreathed round with light grey smoke from its many chimneys; beyond that again stands a conspicuous clump of pines on the hill top near Boxmoor. Passing the *Greyhound Inn* and walking to the north-west, my view is more restricted, but I know that beyond Tring Park, and on the border of Bedfordshire, is the village of Long Marston, and thereby hangs a tale.

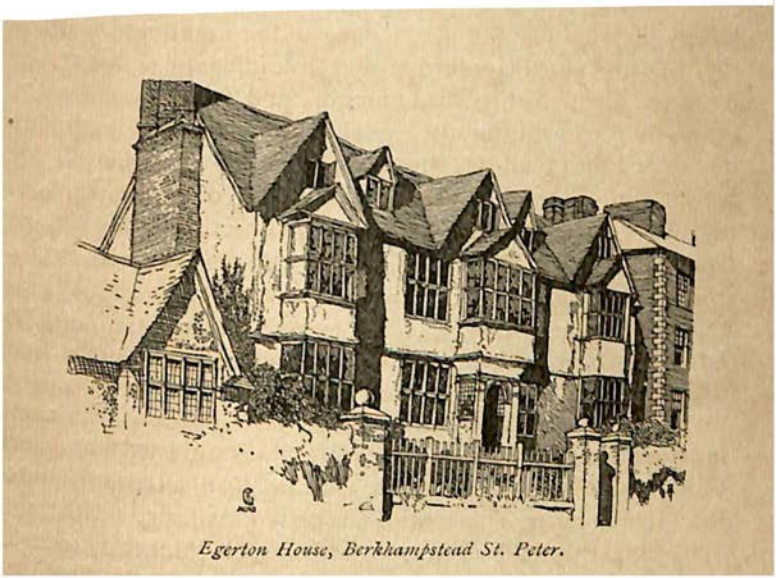
In the year 1751 the town criers at Winslow, at Leighton Buzzard and at Hemel Hempstead announced that on the 22nd of April there would be trial for witchcraft by ducking at Long Marston, in the parish of Tring. John Butterfield, of Gubblecote, had refused to give some buttermilk to an old woman named Ruth Osborn. The woman, on his saying that he had not sufficient to give to his hogs, had said that the Pretender would take both hogs and him. Presently some

calves belonging to Butterfield fell ill, and the man himself was plagued by fits, with which he had suffered when young. Now Butterfield, after putting two and two together, came to the conclusion that he and his belongings were bewitched by Ruth Osborn, and a "wise woman" from Northampton-shire confirmed his fears. Various efforts to drive the devil from Gubblecote proved unavailing, despite the use of charms; so Butterfield, no doubt, aired his grievance far and wide, and the "trial" for witchcraft was the result.

Ruth Osborn and her husband hid themselves in the church on the fatal morning. But a great concourse of persons had come together from far and wide, and were bent on seeing the sport carried through to the end. Baulked at first of their victim, they became riotous. Going to the workhouse in force they dragged out the governor, and according to at least one narrative, threatened to burn him alive and demolish the town unless he produced the witch. They searched every nook and cranny of the premises unsuccessfully. So they moved off towards the church, and presently discovered the hiding place of Ruth Osborn and her husband. The victims were seized, "two superannuated wretches, crazed with age," Gilbert White calls them, and handled as witches and wizards were usually in a cruel and superstitious age. They were taken to the pond at Long Marston; their toes and thumbs were securely tied together; they were wrapped in sheets. In this helpless plight they were dragged to and fro through the water, and with such heartless persistence that the "witch" was drowned there and then, and her husband, John Osborn, died afterwards from his treatment. The crowd dispersed, satisfied with the vengeance they had taken, and probably, as Macaulay says of the censors of Byron, their virtue went quietly to sleep for seven years more.

Then came the reckoning. Whilst Ruth Osborn was in the pond a man named Colley, a chimney sweep, had amused himself by prodding her with a stick and turning her over in

the water. This was such fine sport to the crowd, that Colley afterwards collected money as a reward for their entertainment. When the story reached official ears Colley was arrested, and, at Hertford Assizes, was sentenced to death by Sir William Lee, and was hanged at Gubblecote Cross. The majority seem to have strongly resented his fate. Things had indeed come to a pretty pass when a man was hanged for destroying a mischievous old witch. Colley was long regarded as a martyr. Yet he lacked the courage to testify, for a statement in which he recanted all belief in witchcraft was read publicly by the vicar of Long Marston.



Egerton House, Berkhampstead St. Peter.

CHAPTER VI

TRING, ALDBURY, ASHRIDGE, THE GADDESDENS

THAT Tring is an "ancient town of England" is, I believe, indisputable; but this morning I have been wondering how it has contrived so effectually to conceal its antiquity. When Camden wrote that Hertfordshire is "rich in cornfields, pastures, meadows, woods, groves and clear rivulets," and that "there is scarcely any shire in all England that can show more places of antiquity in so small a compass," I doubt not that Tring had its full share of his thoughts. The neighbourhood is picturesque, as I hope presently to show; but the records of its history are, after all, comparatively meagre, and to demonstrate the antiquity of Tring I should require to reside here for a month and to labour for a week afterwards in the British Museum. A bird's eye view of the disposition of the streets of Tring would readily convince you that the town grew up in the "golden days, long, long ago," for it is dotted and dispersed irregularly around four main, twisted streets; but few of the houses are of great age. An hour's ramble from street to street has brought to my mind, with undesirable vividness, memories of Shoreditch and Whitechapel rather than of any other town. I have been peeping up courtyards and under arches, and trespassing in Willow Court and Tabernacle Yard and Denmark Place, where clusters of tiny cottages are hidden away under the very shadow of inns and in the rear of shops; where groups of children are playing at fivestones or squabbling

about nothing, and women are at the wash-tub with their sleeves rolled up, or gossiping from door to door with their arms a-kimbo. I wonder whether those youngsters still repeat that choice verse which I learnt years back from a native of Berkhamstead :—

"Tring, Wing and Ivinghoe,
Three churches in a row ;
Pull your shoes and stockings off
And jump over them."

Had I visited Tring some years ago I might have sought out one who knew many a snatch and legend of the district. This was old Betty, a well-known person in this far west corner of Hertfordshire, who went "a-fagging" every wheat harvest, and was over one hundred years old when last she gleaned in the fields near here. Farmer and labourer alike knew old Betty ; she was fond of her snuff, and, when asked how she did, invariably answered that she was well enough, but her box was empty. There was a touch of Meg Merrilies in her, too ; for she would rail on occasion against those who endeavoured to enclose common land, plough public footpaths, prosecute the poacher, or infringe the gleaner's immemorial rights. I am told that she died in her hundred and tenth year, and was hale and reasonable almost to the last. She would have afforded an excellent subject for the pen of Crabbe, the Morland of poets ; but, so far as I am aware, she is still unknown to fame. "Much yet remains unsung."

Friday is market day in Tring, and if you had entered the town early in the morning, when the trade in hand-woven plait was at its height, you would have met on every side women coming in from the surrounding villages to sell their handiwork to the Luton dealers. But there is no market here to-day, and very little bustle or stir in the short High Street. Indeed, as I saunter from the corner of Akeman Street to the *Robin Hood* I see nothing out of the common order of things, saving only a sundial over a shop on my

left-hand side, which has told the time o' day since the year 1773. So I retrace my steps and find myself in a long and narrow passage that leads me to Tring Park, in the midst of which stands the home of Lord Rothschild. Originally erected by that master builder, Sir Christopher Wren, the house has been renovated and transformed, and I cannot say whether it retains many traces of Carolean architecture. It is said that the Merry Monarch himself stayed here at times, and that Mistress Nell Gwynn stayed here sometimes, too. At the meeting of the paths through the beech woods, within sight of the house, stands a tall obelisk said to have been "placed there by King Charles the Second in memory of Nell Gwynn." That Charles was in the neighbourhood is likely enough, and it is as likely that he was accompanied by the actress whom Pepys kissed and called a "mighty pretty soul." Readers will remember that the monarch died before the mistress; and when, on Friday morning, the 6th of February, 1685, Charles lay dying in the palace at Whitehall, one of his last sentences was, "Do not let poor Nelly starve."

If there is a more delightful spot in which to take one's ease than Tring Park I should like to know it. Rich, undulating pastures stretch on all sides from the house, crowned on the western side by a grandly wooded hill. The voices of the cuckoo and the dove seem to fill the whole park, stroll where I may. This, considering the quiet seclusion and the time of year, is perhaps no matter for surprise; but I am surprised indeed to come upon a dozen cassowaries and a kangaroo, near the footpath to the museum. They are harmless, unsophisticated birds, these cassowaries, by no means "fearful wild fowl," and two of them stand gaping at me in so ludicrous a manner that I cannot credit them with any desire to swallow missionary man, either here or "on the plains of Timbuctoo," to say nothing of his hat, boots or hymn book. The kangaroo is watching me, too, as he rests his chin upon a wire fence; but

he can make nothing of me, and bounds away towards a large elm, where he regards me furtively for some time from the other side of the trunk. Crossing a little valley I am presently in the shadow of many spreading chestnut trees, then in a fine avenue of beech and yew, edged on either side with young berberis and fir. Another pathway leads me to higher ground, where many hundreds of tall beeches stand shoulder to shoulder; beneath them are thousands of tiny seedlings, rooted in the rich leaf-mould, the deposit of many autumns. How quiet, how fragrant, how impressive it all is! Long vistas of forestine loveliness meet the eye at every turn; the sun, nearing the zenith, fills all these paths with dappled light and shade. I can understand how a Spenser, a Keats, or a Tennyson people such scenes as these with their romantic imaginings; for where should the soul of poesy dwell if it dwells not here? Surely such mossy byways, such scented avenues, were at times the haunt of some "far-renowned brides of ancient song" or of some Guinevere, when—

"A gown of grass-green silk she wore,
Buckled with golden clasps before;
A light-green tuft of plumes she bore
Closed in a golden ring.

* * * *

"She look'd so lovely, as she sway'd,
The rein with dainty finger tips,
A man had given all other bliss,
And all his worldly worth for this,
To waste his whole heart in one kiss
Upon her perfect lips."

Lovely byways these, indeed. From morning to evening I have roamed in the dense hazel-woods around Lord Grimthorpe's estate at Batch Wood near St. Albans, in the beautiful glades of Bricket Wood, in the Beech Hanger at Selbourne, in the Parkhurst and St. Leonard's forests, in the glades of dwarf oak at Saundersfoot on the coast of Pembrokeshire, in the solitudes of the New Forest at Malwood and Lyndhurst and Fordingbridge,

in the woods of Paul Cray and at Theydon Bois, in the domains of another Rothschild near by, where the bridle path winds through miles of beech woods at Wendover; but I assert without hesitation that these walks on the wooded hillside at Tring are as beautiful as any of the spots that I have named. Early in the morning young school girls, their satchels on their shoulders, trip through these woods on their way from Wigginton to Tring. Emerson says that whilst we send our boys to school they educate themselves at the shop windows. Surely the daily walk through woods like these may become a more lovely education.

I find my host and his wife such pleasant folk that I stay in Tring longer than I had thought to do, and worship on Sunday evening in the parish church. Some time in the 15th century this church was built; it is dedicated to St. Peter and St. Paul. Its predominant architectural features are of the Perpendicular order, and the large square tower has that corner turret so often seen in Hertfordshire,—at Barnet, Bushey, Watford, Northchurch and elsewhere. The hand of the restorer rested upon the whole edifice twenty years ago, but the restorer was Mr. Bodley, who appreciates the charm of mediæval architecture, and such features as were deemed of permanent interest and stability were wisely retained. I confess myself wholly unable to identify the design of some of the sculptured corbels above the clustered columns; but Mr. A. Whitford Anderson, himself an architect, has said that they typify the antipathy of the Regular Clergy towards the Friars. "One corbel represents a pig with a friar's cowl; another a fox running off with a goose, an allusion to the wily friar, a third represents a monkey dressed as a friar, with a book in one hand and a bottle in the other." There is a monument here to Sir William Gore, Lord Mayor of London and Lord of the Manor of Tring, and his wife, worthies who died nearly two hundred years ago; but I have looked at these two reclining figures, as one may say, without seeing them, for the organist has been playing that most exquisite Serenatella in C by Valle de Paz, thereby dismissing us with a benediction

more eloquent than words, and the music has monopolised my attention.

It is half an-hour's walk from the town to the railway station at Tring. After passing the sign post on the Berkhampstead road, a long descent, shaded by many trees on the southern side, leads me once again to the towing path of the Grand Junction Canal. Here, however, the scene is not like that of the usual canal side, but far more picturesque. I have passed through a little gateway near the bridge, and scrambled down a most precipitous path to the water side, where—

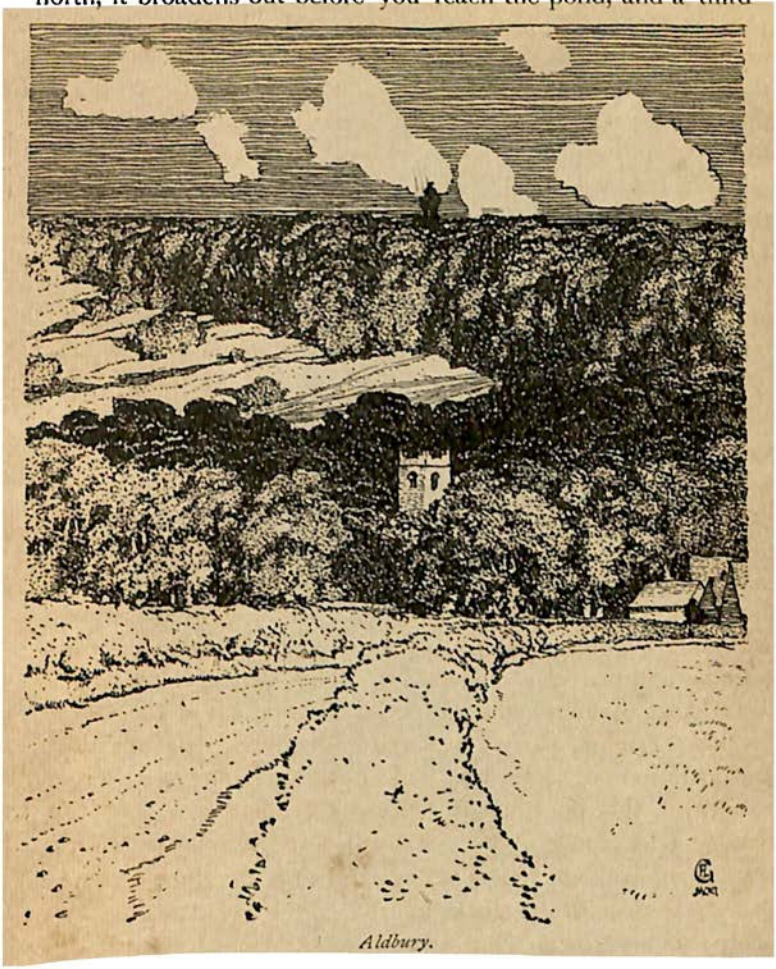
> "By the margin, willow-veil'd,
> Slide the heavy barges trail'd,
> By slow horses;"

where the steep banks on either side are covered with birch and larch and beech, and where wild roses, growing on the very edge of the water, strew it continually with their pink petals, now falling fast. The waters of this canal are in many places clear as a running stream; but the barge that passed just now, parting the masses of floating weed as it went, has left in its wake a muddy turmoil. A train hurrying northwards with its freight of human lives passes through the station as I clamber up the steep, a fact which I note only because it is the last train I shall see for a day or two. For I shall meet no railroad between Tring and Redbourn, a distance of ten miles as the crow flies, but nearer twenty by the roads that I shall tread. These roads take me almost immediately into an open country, smiling brightly in the morning sun, and girt round with wooded hills in the far distance. Here I pass a field of green oats, thickly dotted with poppies and blue corn-flowers, beneath which the ground convolvulus peeps everywhere between the speedwell. Wild strawberries are in full flower on the bankside when I reach the road once more, and, were the year older, my journey would assuredly be slower than it is to-day. But nothing tempts me just now to undue delay, and presently, looking through the hedge towards the east, I

see the village of Aldbury straggling across the valley, five hundred yards away.

Aldbury is one of the few villages in Hertfordshire which has preserved its stocks to this day. The villagers are very proud of these stocks, that stand beside the pond on the green, under the shadow of an enormous elm. They are not so perfect as they were recently, for one day some holiday makers drove down to Aldbury and did their best to destroy as much as possible before leaving. They unfastened the stocks, pelted the upper board with stones and brickbats, and then flung it into the pond. After damaging the lower branches of the elm they turned their attention to the church; romped around the graves outside and, finding the door open, filled the sacred building with ribald shouts and broke portions from the limbs of the effigies of Sir Robert Whittingham and his wife in the Verney Chapel—effigies supposed to have been brought from the monastery of the order of Bonhommes at Ashridge in 1576. A vivid description of all this horseplay is given to me by a very civil Aldbury man, who adds that, had not the men of the village been in the fields at the time, those holiday makers would have been roughly handled. He remembers hearing it said that when last a man was put in the village stocks some women, pitying his sorry plight, borrowed a truss of straw and placed it under him. The man had created a disturbance in church and had been fastened up in that time-honoured fashion, as soon as service was over. The anecdote is plausible enough; for it is well known that many of the last victims of this punishment suffered for offences against the Sunday Observance Acts. Grandsires in Aldbury used also, many years back, to repeat strange stories of the ducking stool, that stood close to the stocks for the correction of scolds and other naughty women; but stories and ducking stool alike are things of the past now. That high elm—loftier and broader once, but lately lopped—has witnessed some strange doings in its time, as for centuries it has looked down upon the actors

in the tragi-comedy of Aldbury life. The village has in some respects reminded me of Tewin ; for, as you approach from the north, it broadens out before you reach the pond, and a third



Aldbury.

angle is formed between the church on your right and the lane upon your left ; moreover, the post office is in a position almost identical with the post office at Tewin. In the church,

loaves are distributed to a few needy folk after service each Sunday morning, out of funds provided by the Harcourt Charity in 1721. Sir Robert Whittingham, whose effigy I have already mentioned, was a Privy Councillor to King Henry VI., and was slain at the battle of Tewkesbury.

A good description of the village of Aldbury will be found scattered here and there in the pages of "Bessie Costrell." My civil friend seems proud of the fact that the creator of "Robert Elsmere" lives "just up the hill" at Stocks House: and he tells me that his own uncle was the man who went down the well, as Mrs. Ward has described. The village of Clinton Magna, upon which John Bolderfield looked on the evening when the story opens, is easily identified with this village of Aldbury, as I can see plainly enough from my resting place near the stocks. "The last radiant light was on the wheat-field under the hill, and on the long chalk hill itself. Against that glowing background lay the village, already engulfed by the advancing shadows . . . . Far ahead rose the square tower of the church; to his left was the hill, and straight in front of him the village, with its veils of smoke lightly brushed over the trees, and its lines of cottages climbing the chalk steeps behind it . . . . He passed the village green with its pond, and began to climb a lane leading to the hill." I am facing the direction from which John Bolderfield came; before me is the pond, on my left the church, on my right the hill. Yes, it is easy to see that Aldbury is the village of Clinton Magna, where Bessie Costrell committed suicide after squandering the savings of John Bolderfield.

The tinkle of many sheep-bells falls upon my ear as I climb the chalk hill towards the beech-crowned height of Ashridge. Turning to my left, I stroll in zig-zag fashion across the western face of the slope, and pause now and then to peer down upon the village of Aldbury among the trees, now so far below. Another stiff ascent brings me before

the monumental column, conspicuous for many miles around, which was erected to the memory of the third Duke of Bridgewater, in the year 1832. He it was who directed the formation of the first really artificial canal in England, from Worsley to Manchester, a work which earned for him the well-known title "the father of British inland navigation." For many years he was remembered as much for his eccentricities as for his enterprise. We are told, for instance, that his features resembled those of George III.; that he would never permit a female to wait upon him; that he was called the first great Manchester man; that he subscribed £100,000 to the Loyalty Loan; that he delighted in the destruction of flowers; that he took snuff and smoked inordinately, and that he dressed like Dr. Johnson. He never married, and, in 1803, the title became extinct at his death. From the monument I look down a long avenue, called the Prince's Riding, at the end of which, in the midst of a thousand acres of far-famed park, stands Ashridge House, now the seat of Lord Brownlow.

When, shortly before the dissolution of the monasteries, John Skelton visited Ashridge, he seems to have found many things to interest him. In his poem *The Crowne of Laurell* he wrote:—

> "Of the bone hôms at Ashridge beside Barcanstede,
> That goodly place to Skelton most kynde,
> Where the sange royall is, Christis blood so rede,
> Whereupon he metrified after his mynde,
> A pleasanter place than Ashridge is harde were to find;"

and I have quoted the lines of the quaint, caustic, satirical old Laureate because, in explaining Skelton's allusions, I shall write a good deal of what I wish to record whilst in the neighbourhood of Ashridge Park.

When Edmond Earl of Cornwall, a nephew of King Henry III., was in Saxony, he obtained a most wonderful and efficacious relic. This was no less a rarity than a particle of the blood of Christ! A relic of such priceless value required

careful guarding, and when, in 1283, Edmond founded a monastery here at Ashridge he placed "Christis blood so rede" in the care of the monks. These monks were of an order previously introduced by him into England, the order of Bon Hommes (Skelton's "bone homs"), who lived under Augustinian rules and are said by Mosheim to have been spiritually descended from the sect of the Paulicians. And so, for many years, nineteen brethren and their rector lived here at "Ashridge beside Barcanstede" in pious retirement, prayed for the soul of their founder's father, as they had covenanted to do, exhibited their relic of Christ's blood to countless pilgrims—and waxed rich. When the dissolution overtook them it revealed the secret of two hundred and fifty years of fraud. On 24th February, 1538, there was a crowd gathered around Paul's Cross, and there too was Holbeach, Bishop of Rochester. He opened the eyes of the multitude to the delusions practised by the monks, and, exhibiting freely the holy relic which so many had given money to view at Ashridge, he told them that it was not blood of any kind whatever, but clarified honey coloured with a little saffron!

Skelton found Ashridge a pleasant place and other visitors find it pleasant too. I am quite aware of the fact that part of this goodly heritage is in Buckinghamshire, and that I am therefore a trespasser, but what is the use of living in a free country if one cannot take a liberty sometimes? I have been loitering among acres of bracken, and looking at some of the finest beech trees I am ever likely to see. These noble trees stand together so closely at one spot that their branches interlace above my head. In the open park the heat is fierce to-day, and I am glad to find myself in such a deliciously cool avenue and am in no hurry to move. Moreover, an old man is busy with his broom and barrow, sweeping the pathways, and I am grateful for his company during the half hour that I devote to idleness. The deer, too, are worth watching; I can see many of them moving slowly across an open valley in the park, three or four hundred

yards away; while, erect and motionless, a fine stag is apparently watching them from his vantage ground upon my left. I wonder if the Princess Elizabeth, who was at Ashridge when the sweating sickness was prevalent in 1551 and had studied under Grindal and Ascham, used to employ herself here in the same manner as afterwards at Hatfield—"playing on the lute or virginals, embroidering with gold or silver, reading Greek and translating Latin." Her brother Edward had given her this fine manor in the days of his kingship, and I will answer for it she was mightily proud of her possession. She was arrested here during the reign of that exceedingly objectionable lady, her sister Queen Mary, under remarkable circumstances. In the year 1554 Thomas Wyat, whose father had assisted Surrey to "correct the ruggedness of English Poetry," headed the rebellion down in Kent which sealed the fate of Lady Jane Grey, and Elizabeth was suspected of being privy to the uprising. The commissioners sent to arrest her reached Ashridge at night time. They were armed with strict orders to remove her to London without delay; Elizabeth was ill in bed, or feigned to be so, but the commissioners were not to be denied. They entered the bed-room of the Princess, ordered her to accompany them to London early in the morning, and, before many hours had passed, Elizabeth was a prisoner in the Tower.

Two of the Earls of Bridgewater, once masters of Ashridge, lie buried at Little Gaddesden, a village at the north-east corner of the park. They were both noteworthy men. John, the second Earl, in his youth played the "elder brother" in Milton's *Comus*, when it was produced under his father's auspices at Ludlow Castle; in his maturity, he with Clarendon and Sheldon, Bishop of London, presided over the conference upon the Act of Uniformity in 1662, and seems to have been greatly esteemed. Chauncy knew this second earl intimately and describes him as of "a modest and grave aspect, a sweet and pleasant countenance, a comely presence,"—in a word, a man fitly developed from the youth who in Milton's masque

presented a pattern of virtuous philosophy. The eighth earl, Francis Henry, was the man to whom we owe the famous Bridgewater Treatises, for he suggested the preparation of the series and bequeathed £8,000 for the necessary funds. In the neighbourhood he was remembered, like the third duke many years afterwards, for his eccentricities of character. Dogs and cats abounded in his house, attired like men and women; they sat at his table at meal times and were with him when he drove out in his carriage. His garden was the home of great numbers of rabbits and of birds of various kinds with clipped wings, for in his latter days the Earl considered it fine sport to kill such helpless game for the requirements of his larder.

A name greatly honoured in the village of Little Gaddesden is that of Lady Marion Alford. Standing away from the village, amid the fields, is the tiny church dedicated to St. Peter and St. Paul: when that church was restored in 1877 it was Lady Alford who presented the new pulpit. Her memory lives also in the village homes for needy widows, the Bede Houses. But the people for whom she cared and laboured have been careful to keep her memory green in the land by other works than hers. At the south end of the older half of the village there is an entrance to Ashridge Park, and near the gateway stands a marble fountain designed for the use of man and beast, and surmounted by a tall cross. Around the fountain well-known words are cut: "Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." Behind the fountain, and shaded by beautiful cupressus, is a large, semi-circular stone seat, bearing the inscription: "In loving memory of the Lady Marion Alford erected June 21 1891 by her friends." A little further south what seems a second village opens out before me, with well shaded greensward before its doorways. A robin, hopping leisurely here and there beneath an elm, seems quite accustomed to the presence

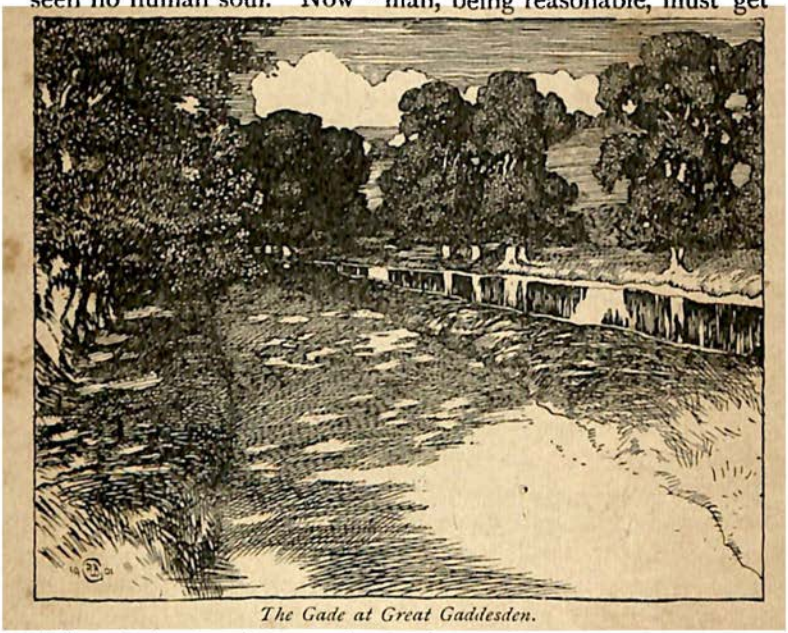
of several children who are sitting on the grass, not six yards from him, and has reminded me of two lines which Gray wrote, but did not print in his "Elegy":

> "The redbreast loves to build and warble there,
> And little footsteps lightly print the ground."

Certainly there is nothing odd or uncanny in the appearance of Little Gaddesden to-day. But strange things happened here long back, in those days when strange things so often occurred; for one day, in the year 1664, two small devils or imps came riding down a chimney on a stick, and so grievously bewitched one Mary Hall, the daughter of the village blacksmith, that she gesticulated wildly and spake in two unknown voices.

Our Saxon forefathers chose wisely when they made their homes, as they so often did, in the little leafy valleys of old England. How picturesque those "denes" invariably are!—Gaddesden, Nettleden, Flaunden, Harpenden, are all in the valley, as their names denote. You come upon these homesteads unawares as, emerging from tangled lanes, or from some footpath through the cornfields, a sudden turn shows you the village almost at your feet. They are still small and scattered, these valley villages, for the sons of Hodge love not the tasks to which Hodge was bred, and have gone away from home to fill the towns. Away there on my right a footpath leads to Water End; before me rises the hill upon which stands Gaddesden Place, the house which Wyatt built in 1774, now the home of the Right Hon. T. F. Halsey, M.P.; upon my left stand a score of cottages, the *Cock and Bottle*, the parish church—and this is Great Gaddesden, a village in the valley of the Gade. So far as I can judge it is much smaller than Little Gaddesden, and even less alive. Man is the least conspicuous inhabitant in the neighbourhood. Wagtails are busy paddling in the pools by the shrunken stream; meadow-brown butter-

flies are jerking themselves along the lanes and across fields as though hesitating to go any further before sunset; brown skippers are dodging in and out among the poppies, wild-heartsease and white campions; gnats are swarming above the bridge, in the churchyard, and indeed everywhere; blue titmice, "light of heart and light of limb," are squabbling in the hedge before the doorway of the *Cock and Bottle*; but so far I have seen no human soul. Now "man, being reasonable, must get



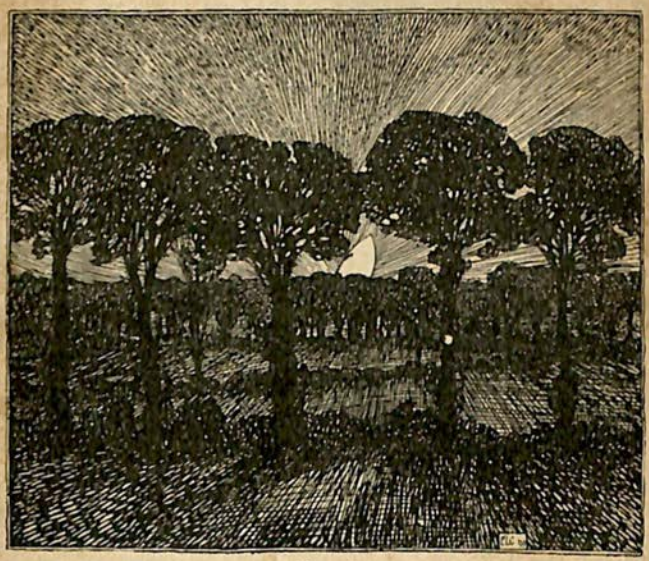
The Gade at Great Gaddesden.

fed," and, in the villages, the inn is usually the best place for such a purpose; so I presently interview mine host of the *Cock and Bottle*, thereby satisfying myself that Great Gaddesden is really inhabited, and that it was no mere fancy which told me just now that I was hungry.

The Gade, a small streamlet for the greater part of its course, bears but few burdens on its bosom. It rises in the midst of the quiet country between here and Little Gaddesden and

passes beneath this bridge as a stream but a few feet wide. It passes many villages as it loiters on its way to join the Colne at Rickmansworth. It passes Piccott's End and Water End; it flows through the park to which it gives its name, and thence past Hemel Hempstead and Boxmoor, where it mingles its waters with those of the Bulbourne. It passes King's Langley and Hunton Bridge; it passes Grove Park; it divides the noble park at Cassiobury into the "Upper" and the "Home" Parks. Palæolithic man roamed in the valley of the Gade when as yet the Langleys and the Gaddesdens were not, and left chipped flints behind him to tell of his wanderings. Such flints are picked up at times from beds of lacustrine origin—relics, perhaps, of a time when such low levels were broad stretches of mere, haunted by innumerable wild-fowl, and fed by almost tropic rains. The Roman, too, had his villa by the Gade; his coins, his pottery, his pavements have been brought to light near Boxmoor, and one of his most famous highways ran, as we shall presently see, a few miles to the east. How we treasure up these rare relics of the Romans! Ah, Master John Earle, you hardly did credit to your wit when you penned those brief, sneering sentences concerning the antiquary in your *Microcosmographie*. "A great admirer he is of the rust of old monuments, reads only those characters, where time hath eaten out the letters. He will go you forty miles to see a saint's well or a ruined abbey; and there be but a cross or stone foot-stool in the way, he'll be considering it so long, till he forgets his journey. His estate consists much in shekels, and Roman coins. . . ." Well, neither cross nor stone foot-stool is near me now, for I have wandered from Great Gaddesden as one wanders in a dream, hardly noticing anything by the way, but thinking how strangely the pages of the book of human life are turned over one by one. We have come far indeed from palæolithic man—so far that the Roman of whom I wrote just now was but of yesterday and of no antiquity at all. I suppose we all once learned

that our race is six thousand years old; but we have changed all that now. We have discovered that in such valleys as this valley of the Gade the lion lay in wait for its prey, the mammoth roamed hither and thither at its own sweet will, and, what is more to my purpose, primitive man was here too, sharpening deer horns into daggers, and speaking in a meagre vocabulary which betrayed the limitations of his thought, twenty or thirty thousand years ago.



Moonrise.

CHAPTER VII

FLAMSTEAD, REDBOURN, HARPENDEN

THERE are now few relics of monasticism remaining in Hertfordshire, but once upon a time the monks and nuns were much in evidence hereabouts. As I go up the hill towards Beechwood Park I remember that there once stood among this boscage a Benedictine nunnery; and, as I have already mentioned, there was one of the most wealthy of all Benedictine monasteries a few miles from Gaddesden. As followers of the order of Benedict, those monks were trained to labour and obey, to sleep in their habits and arise at a moment's notice, to eat only by daylight, to keep silence at meal times whilst one brother read aloud, to possess nothing unless by permission of their abbot, to read through at least one book from the library during Lent, and to study all day on Sunday. The story of the Benedictine monk has furnished material for many a romance; and certainly the history of the order of St. Benedict needs no embellishment, but is a novel thoroughly furnished unto all good purposes of entertainment. Why should not I, a wayfarer in these quiet Hertfordshire roads, having wandered once again almost within sight of what was once the great Benedictine Monastery at St. Albans, rest awhile in the shadow of this grand old elm, and recall a few facts in this romance of history? You may be sure that he who set so great a body of missionary monks agoing was himself no ordinary man. His is the most potent name in the history of early monasticism in the

West. Surrounded by men of vicious life in Rome, he was one of those—

> "Who quit a world where strong temptations try
> And since 'tis hard to combat, learn to fly."

He fled from Rome that he might the easier resist Satan, and dwelt alone in a gorge, by the river Anio, about forty miles from the great and wicked city, having found a dark grotto in which to seclude himself; a friendly monk from near by supplied his simple needs. Satan, ever close to him in those early days, tempted him now sorely, assuming the form of a lovely woman; but Benedict lacerated himself with briars and thorns, and the devil presently withdrew, never to plague him again with a like temptation. So great was his renown for sanctity that after about three years of retirement he was chosen by some monks as their head; but they soon rebelled against his rule and tried to kill him. I have no space to narrate the many anecdotes, some of which savour of the miraculous, that are told concerning the life of Benedict during the years in which he founded his first monasteries and grew daily in sanctity and fame. At Monte Cassino he settled down to work near where the poor peasant still brought his offerings to the Temple of Apollo on the hill above the river Garigliano.

> ". . . more than thirteen centuries ago,
> Benedict, fleeing from the gates of Rome,
> A youth disgusted with its vice and woe
> Sought in these mountain solitudes a home.
>
> "He founded here his Convent and his Rule
> Of Prayer and work, and counted work as prayer,
> His pen became a clarion, and his school
> Flamed like a beacon in the midnight air."

I must refer readers to the pages of Gregory the Great, of Milman and other writers for the story of that monastery, destined to become famous the wide world round, which was gradually erected on the site of the heathen temple which Benedict had

destroyed. The great visionary and enthusiast lived to see his work spread far and wide and his disciples numerous, and when, in the year 543, he shared the fate of all flesh, the fame of the monastery of Monte Cassino was such that "he was thenceforth regarded as the head and chief of the monastic orders." Two hundred and fifty years elapsed between the death of Benedict and the founding of a monastery for an abbot and one hundred monks a few miles from where I am musing to-day, and so greatly did the monks of this order multiply in England alone that when monasticism was overthrown more than seven centuries later no fewer than 186 of the houses dissolved were of the order of Benedict. And to this order, as I have said, belonged the sisterhood that lived awhile on a spot now surrounded by this beautiful Beechwood Park.

By bearing to the left presently I might reach, after half-an-hour's stroll, the village of Markyate Street, once associated with a monk of whom we know a little from a curious Cottonian manuscript. But the clouds are lowering and I have far to go, so will keep straight on in my appointed course. My thoughts, however, are free to fly whither I please, so as I wind in and out among the beeches that have given this neighbourhood its name I may as well think of the monk Roger as of anybody else. There is a touch of the Platonic in the tale. Roger had once lived as a hermit in a cell near Dunstable and had given his days to fasting and to prayer in truly exemplary fashion. Christina, a lady from the neighbourhood of Huntingdon, was like minded, and Roger provided her with a retreat near his own. They were associated in deeds of piety and doubtless held one another in high esteem. Perhaps Roger wearied at length of such seclusion, or had heard much of the great monastery of St. Albans, for we read that he became a monk within its walls. One day he opened his mind to Abbot Geoffrey de Gorham touching a spot well suited to the requirements of a pious foundation, just to the north of Markyate Street. So the abbot built a priory at

Markyate Cell for nuns of the Benedictine order, and their first prioress was the lady Christina. Their church, consecrated by Alexander, Bishop of Lincoln, was dedicated to the Holy Trinity in the Wood. For dame or maiden piously disposed there was then no retreat so safe as the nunnery. Without its walls were the world, the flesh and the devil. In the forest was the robber; in the castle, only too often, dwelt high-handed robbers too, knowing no law save that of the strong arm; they took what they could, and kept it so long as they were able. Roger the monk was buried in the abbey at St. Albans, beneath the south aisle of the baptistery, and an inscription was placed above his grave.

Flamstead, to which I come sooner than I anticipated, despite the rain which has commenced to fall, is a quiet little village. It stands on high ground, just above the hamlet of Trowley Bottom, and is itself a mere cluster of humble habitations. It is perhaps as well that I do not look for much matter here, for as I stroll into Flamstead from the west great banks of black cloud are looming upon the horizon both behind and before, and I do not care to loiter in churchyards or saunter from end to end of village streets in the pelting rain. What are now but intermittent showers will be a storm anon, for those clouds are stretching themselves rapidly across the valley,

> "The ragged rims of thunder brooding low,
> With shadow-streaks of rain."

But why need a man stand in the rain when the sign-board of *The Bell Inn* seems to invite his entrance? So I ensconce myself near the chimney corner to jot down some memory of the neighbourhood, whilst the wind whistles around the stout open doorway, and the rain is beating against tower and nave of the old, old church of St. Leonard, that stands just over the way—it has stood there, they tell me, for about six hundred years. As there is an old brass in the chancel, representing a parson in a cope, and as this parson

was one John Oudeby, a rector of this church, who died in 1414, the church may be even older than I am given to believe, but, as Mr. Griggs has warned me, it behoves us to be sceptical at times touching the antiquity of churches. There are places in Hertfordshire where a church of some kind has covered a particular spot for a thousand years; but the archæologist chiefly yearns to know whether any portion of the original fabric still survives in the present edifice. The church here at Flamstead is of flint, the massive, square tower buttressed with newer brickwork; the vestry to the north of the chancel was a chapel once. More often than not our parish churches have been partially restored at long intervening periods, and even where they have been entirely rebuilt the older material has sometimes been utilised afresh, being often almost indestructible, like the tiles in the tower of St. Alban's Abbey, which, as I have mentioned, were taken from the ruins of the ancient city of Verulam. Such materials are the wonder of each succeeding age. "Those ancient builders wrought cunningly with their materials. The bricks are fashioned and fixed to last for all time. . . . Neglected by unheeding generations, with flowers clustering in their crannies, and birds nesting in their eaves, . . . they still present angles as sharp as when they were but finished, and joints as nice as when the mortar dried in the first months of their building. This immunity from age and injury they owe partly to the imperishable nature of baked clay; partly to the care of the artists who selected and mingled the right sorts of earth, burned them with scrupulous attention, and fitted them together with a patience born of loving service." These words were penned by John Addington Symonds near the Cathedral campanile at Crema. He might almost have penned them beneath the shadow of the tower of Abbot Paul de Caen at St. Albans.

Now that the rain has ceased and the sun shines once more on Flamstead I have ventured forth from my place of shelter

and find fresh entertainment in chatting to a couple of old women over the low wall before the almshouses. How sweet the air is on this hilltop after the rain! The sparrows chirp so cheerily on the roof that I am sure they too appreciate the cooler atmosphere, and would tell me so were they able. The village men are mostly at work some distance off, and were it not for some refractory youngsters, just now sadly at variance with maternal rule, I might meet but few persons in the immediate neighbourhood until evening. My impressions are corroborated by the old pensioners in the "Thomas Saunders" almshouses, and they ought to know. These homes were built in 1669; and I should like to learn the story of their inmates from the first; but the 'short and simple annals of the poor' are in fact no annals at all, for they are as yet unwritten. The inmates of such almshouses as these are usually old, and often infirm, and in their case, no doubt, there is but little to record. You may see them pottering feebly from door to door along their common frontage within the wall, or if they venture abroad it is often only so far as to the church, or a couple of hundred yards along the road. You may see them sitting in the open doorway, looking for the most part contented enough, and hear them talking from time to time to themselves, or to the cat who lies basking in the sun, curled up upon the cobbles near their feet. Thus they pass week after week, with but little to ruffle the serenity of their existence, until they are carried to their graves and "life's poor play is o'er."

The word Flamstead is a corruption of Verlamsteád, the river Ver flowing through the neighbouring valley. I say the *river*, for as such I have known it for many a year, but so great has been the recent drought that to-day the Ver is not even a brooklet babbling down the plain. Its bed is utterly dry—a long, twisting, brown line running through the meadows towards Redbourn. So I cannot watch it stealing past the sedges as I have done so oft, nor listen to that ripple and swirl of waters which I love so well; but continue

my way somewhat discontentedly until I come out into the main road from St. Albans to Dunstable.

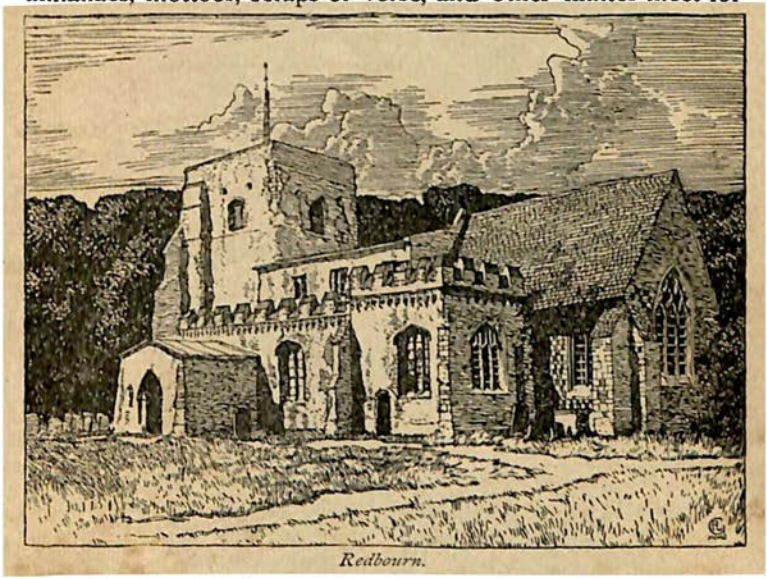
The old, old road—the Roman Watling Street. The road trodden by stern legionaries so long ago that their figures, even to the learned, are a little dim. But the figures of others who trod this ground before the Roman are fainter still, for we hardly know what manner of men they were. We know that before the Roman came into Hertfordshire and called it *Flavia Cæsariensis* a wild and wandering race, the Cassü or Catyeuchlani, were in the deep forests of this district; but our knowledge of their appearance or characteristics is pitiably meagre. It was the Roman who changed what was perhaps a rude track for man and beast into a wide and durable highway, and who marched along it on his way to and from the city of Verulam which he built, or rebuilt after he had vanquished the Briton who had before made his home upon the spot. Now I am ignorant as to the precise period when this Watling Street was first made a thoroughfare such as only Romans could make, and cannot say whether it was a road indeed when Boadicea, incensed against the citizens of Verulam for their allegiance to her torturers, led her followers by thousands towards the city and massacred a multitude of souls. Such details as were recorded by Tacitus and Dion Cassius are almost too horrible to quote; but we must remember that Boadicea had much to avenge and had inflamed her followers by her harangues. She had been, as Milton says, "violated with stripes" and had sought counsel from the Druid whilst still, as Cowper puts it, "bleeding from the Roman rods"; she had therefore gone towards Verulam with the feelings of the religious fanatic. About 70,000 Romans and Britons perished to glut her vengeance, and Dion Cassius relates that women were stripped, and with their breasts cut off and sewed to their mouths, seemed to consume their own flesh whilst in the agonies of death. Of the terrible revenge taken in turn by the Romans elsewhere, this is no place to write. When, in the fulness of time, the Saxon swarmed

along this Roman road, he altered the name of Verulam to Werlamceaster or Watlingceaster, because the Watling Street ran through the town, passing through that dense weald which extended for forty miles north-west from London, and was infested by a tribe of wild men called the "Waetlings."

This great highway, according to Sumner, bore once the name *mendicorum via*—the beggar's road; and I am not sure that it does not still deserve to be so called. But I am little disposed to revile the needy mendicant; for before me is the long, straight street of Redbourn, where Stephens, an old friend of Keats, lived as a medical practitioner, and where Keats himself came once in the coach from St. Albans, accompanied by his brother George and the "Nymph of the downward smile and side-long glance." It is eighty years since that coach pulled up at the inn here, where the party alighted to dine, little dreaming, I will answer for it, that the slightly-built but square-shouldered young man, who seemed so fond of "Sister George," was destined to leave behind him an imperishable name. When he visited this village his name was not yet known among men; he was only a person who wrote verses, albeit he had "an eye that had an inward look, perfectly divine, like a Delphian priestess who saw visions."

In this village of Redbourn there lived, a few years back, one of a fast dying type of man. He was old even when first I knew him, bent and feeble, with white hair, and sunburnt, kindly face. He used to walk from here to St. Albans, bearing a large basket of watercress suspended from a stout stick which he bore upon his shoulder. With another stick he walked. He wore a "gamekeeper's jacket" of brown velvet, with pockets large enough to hold a rabbit, and trousers of corduroy. His figure was familiar to all wayfarers on this high road from Dunstable to St. Albans, for he had traversed it, in fair weather and foul, for many years. I remember his feeble footsteps and stooping gait as he came up our long

garden path and the effort with which he put his burden to the ground. He was glad of a few minutes' rest before he went his way towards the town. His had been a strange and chequered life; he had been in many a poaching escapade, and could still call a rabbit from its hole with the best of them. I visited him in his little cottage at Redbourn, more than twenty years ago, and remember how the walls were covered with almanacs, mottoes, scraps of verse, and other matter meet for



Redbourn.

his edification in leisure moments. He was somewhat reticent, unless he knew you well, but once the ice was broken he had a rare fund of racy anecdotes, poaching stories, village legends. He was gratified when his listeners appeared interested, and still more so when they accepted a cup of tea under his roof. I remember, too, how an aged relative of mine once asked him the question, "What are you resting on?" The question was hardly one that every man could readily apprehend, but he understood its import, and replied in simple, appropriate

language. His autobiography would have made an interesting volume, for, in some respects, he was Gilbert White and Richard Jefferies in one, with a little of George Borrow thrown in. He had snatched jack and tickled trout, drawn rabbits and reared fox cubs, and his opinion on such matters was much respected.

But I have a story to tell which is not culled from my personal reminiscences, a story, such as Southey dearly loved, of the devil and a Popish novice. No doubt the narrative was once regarded as a singular corroboration of Scripture, for it proved conclusively that rather more than two centuries ago Satan was still walking abroad in this wicked world as a roaring lion. As such he came near to this village of Redbourn and there he favoured an inn with his visitations. Now it chanced that the young Papist, whose name was Michael Beynon, was sojourning at the same inn. On the first night Beynon went to bed betimes and for a while slept the sleep of the righteous. But about two o'clock in the morning he awoke, and was greatly perturbed on so doing; for a wondrous light seemed to play upon his bedroom wall, now this way, now that, in truly astonishing fashion. What he thought the light imported I cannot say, but he did what most pious young travellers of like persuasion did in those days: he got out of bed and prayed to the Virgin Mary and other potent interceders. Next day he took no food but spent much time in prayer; for, on reflecting upon the vision of the flickering light, he believed that, like so many holy men of olden times, he had seen an angel. Now all this was so far well enough, and indeed profitable to the soul; but there was stranger work to follow. On the next morning he was again awakened, this time at about three o'clock, and again the wondrous light was on the wall; but Beynon was sleepy, as even Popish novices often were, so he sought to pay no heed to the vision, but to sleep again. Just then something touched him on the shoulder, and he heard a voice which said "Sleep not." The speaker was a

young and pretty child, and the sight of this angelic visitor so impressed his mind that he pattered his prayers to the Virgin afresh, and conducted himself during the next few hours in the same spirit of abstinence and supplication as on the day before, and the evening found him fasting and at prayer. Again he was awakened out of sleep, and saw the light upon the wall. Feeling as though some weight lay on his feet, he stretched himself in order to remove it. Just as he did so he heard something move behind his pillow. Nobody, however, was to be seen, so being this time greatly terrified he fell upon his knees and told his beads. Then the devil, never a lover of beads, showed himself in earnest; for on looking round the room once more the novice saw as it were a lion in chains and dogs around the lion. Prayers to the Virgin and Saints seemed of no avail, so presently the novice bethought him of the name of Christ and this, after a while, gave him such assurance that he defied the devil and dogs alike, and told them they could do him no harm. And so the devil departed, and, as writers assure us, only on one other occasion did the father of lies ever presume to show himself bodily to a man in Hertfordshire. Staunch Protestants who have not met with this true story before will be pleased to know that henceforth Beynon forsook the errors of the Church of Rome.

There is but little stir in the street of Redbourn this morning, and I have been thinking that the village must have known more rush and go in the good old coaching days. For Redbourn was wont to provide breakfast for Birmingham passengers each morning, and to cater also at intervals for folk bent on reaching Liverpool or Holyhead in the least possible time. What oddly sorted companies must have passed this way! Old ladies to whose tastes the driver refused to adjust his speed; old nondescripts who told older stories for the edification of their fellows and exchanged unsavoury anecdotes; Roderick Randoms and other such adventurers on life's highway; invalids who travelled perforce and refused to be comforted; three-

bottle men of the school of Walpole (now, as Mr. John Morley has assured us, extinct as the Dodo); timid misses—one day, perhaps, to blossom into Becky Sharps—on their way to boarding school. All these, and more than these, have bowled along this road full many a time; for life was more variously represented on the great coaching roads than elsewhere. It was more exciting, too. Even in those days the coaches were timed, and often enough the driver found it politic to disguise the spirit of rivalry under the cloak of punctuality. And what rivalries they were! Tony Weller, when, by an unforeseen and deeply regretted accident, he deposited his passengers in the river, caused no more commotion than many a driver who objected to have a coach before him as well as behind. A too earnest desire to reach Redbourn punctually was once responsible for a collision between the Chester and Holyhead mails. It was late at night. The coaches had been racing down from town, and were close to St. Albans, when George Butler, the driver of the Chester mail, deliberately turned his leaders across Tom Perdy's track. The Holyhead mail was upset; one man was killed and several injured. Perdy and Butler were indicted for murder at the *Peahen Inn*, St. Albans, and were found guilty of manslaughter. As they were kept in irons for six months before their trial, and were then sentenced to twelve months' imprisonment at Hertford, they must have fully realised that the desire for punctuality, however commendable in itself, may be carried to unwise extremes.

Tom Perdy and George Butler belonged to a race of pimple-nosed wayfarers and sturdy trenchermen now, like Marley, as dead as a door-nail. "Theirs was the giant race before the flood"—the flood of nineteenth century innovations which Mother Shipton is still believed to have foreseen so clearly. Is not Thackeray's prophecy fast ripening into fact? "To those great geniuses now in petticoats who shall write novels for the beloved readers' children, these men and things will be as much legend and history as Nineveh, or Cœur de

Lion, or Jack Sheppard. For them stage coaches will have become romances, and a team of four bays as fabulous as Bucephalus or Black Bess." There has been no stage or mail upon this Redbourn road within my own memory, though it is not so many years since I loved to watch the coach leave the *Peahen Inn*, at St. Albans, for a brisk run to London in the afternoon. But even where the coach still runs, the men—passenger, coachman and guard—are not the men immortalised by Mr. Outram Tristram, and I doubt whether the coachman lives who could now turn in at the *Sugar Loaf* at Dunstable and do such justice to its colossal menu in an hour as men were wont to do in twenty minutes. I may linger outside the *Bull Inn* as long as I please, but Tom Perdy or his like will come this way no more, and to stand in the street in a brown study is not to re-create the coaching days. Perhaps it is all for the best. I fear Tom Perdy would be sick at heart, were he to drive abroad now, to find that folk ride on two wheels instead of four, and that the *Punch Bowl*, which stood back from the road on his right hand side as he drove from St. Albans to Redbourn, is a spick and span, brand new establishment.

There is much of interest in the neighbourhood of Redbourn, as there is everywhere if one has eyes to see it, but we who wander around a county for a definite purpose must perforce, even though that county be small, keep the blind side of Father Time if we would make a seasonable finish, and now and then find it necessary to note what we *might* see had we greater leisure. Charles Dickens once penned a very rhetorical paragraph about Hertfordshire; and no district in the county better illustrates every clause of that paragraph than the neighbourhood of Redbourn. "Down among the pleasant dales and trout-streams of a green English county. No matter what county. Enough that you may hunt there, shoot there, fish there, traverse long, grass-grown Roman roads there, open ancient barrows there, see many a square mile of richly cul-

tivated land there, and hold Arcadian talk with a bold peasantry, their country's pride, who will tell you (if you want to know) how pastoral housekeeping is done on nine shillings a week." I have seen something of those pleasant dales and trout-streams since I set out upon my way, and need but to ramble around Redbourn for awhile to know that hunting, shooting, and fishing are not neglected arts hereabouts. Was not snipe-shooting, as practised by many a sportsman in the valley of the Ver, discussed an hour ago at the *Tom in Bedlam Inn*? Water-rails, too, were very plentiful a few years back at Redbourn Bury, and must have sorely taxed the patience of local shots; for few birds, even among the *Grallatores*, are so shy, so fond of creeping quietly in and out of the densest herbage by the water's edge. The old Roman road, whose story I have been thinking of this morning, is certainly "long" but it is not now "grass-grown," for men of the Hertfordshire County Council, their badges on their leg, pass along it with broom and shovel and barrow, and, like Attila and his hordes, leave no green blade in their wake. The barrow of St. Amphibalus on Redbourn Common was once more venerated than it is to-day, for the story of that saint was more implicitly believed. His capture in Wales and death here at Redbourn have been mentioned in my third chapter. His name is even now deemed worthy of remembrance, and, on the high altar screen at St. Alban's stands a statue of the saint in a beautifully moulded niche. Upon his left arm lie the folds of his robe; his right hand is raised as if to solicit attention. The barrow here, as the legend tells us, was rifled long ago, and the spot now attracts less notice than the well-worn pitch hard by where noisy youngsters are this morning playing cricket. An account of the sufferings of Alban and Amphibalus was written in the vernacular by a pious catechumen thirteen hundred years ago; and that narrative, at the instigation of Symon, 19th abbot of St. Albans, was turned into Latin by William the Monk in the year 1170, and may be

found in *Acta Sanctorum*. The same narrative was versified by one Ralph de Dunstable, and another life of Amphibalus was translated, from French and Latin sources, by John Lydgate during the Abbacy of John Wheathampsted and printed at St. Albans in 1534. What a dust a man may sometimes raise!

It is fortunate that I may forget monkish chronicles when I please, and contemplate scenery rather than saints, for who could long concentrate his thoughts upon dusty tomes or manuscripts whilst making his way through Rothamstead Park towards Harpenden? My road dips down to the bed of the shrunken Ver and then rises into a pleasant, twisting lane, and I am among the rooks and starlings in the park before I have quite forgotten the indignant Queen of the Iceni, the Roman Watling Street, or the story of Saint Amphibalus. I will bother my head about such themes no more just now, for I know my road, even before I tread it afresh, and shall find plenty of natural sights to occupy my eye and my pen for a few hours. How crisply the caw of the rook comes to the ear on this hot afternoon from the top of those high elms, and how busy the starlings seem as they strut hither and thither in the sun! I have never seen so many rooks in my life as in Rothamstead Park. I suppose they congregate here to discuss their state affairs, and, to judge from the commotion, their business must be in a sorry tangle. Moreover they all talk at once, a custom which occasionally obtains among other communities than those of the *Corvidæ*. I remember that the congregating of birds in enormous numbers—in that case starlings—was once watched by Mr. Henry Lewis, at a spot called No Man's Land near this park. It was in the month of October, and from an old cutting which I have preserved from the columns of the *Herts Advertiser*, I find that the starlings arrived in "hundreds of thousands from all points of the compass," and that from a distance their voices were "like the roar of the ocean on a pebbly shore."

Coming out presently upon Harpenden Common I know that I am upon ground which has evoked the praise of many, and the praise is merited. As you walk from St. Albans you come upon the common suddenly, and, if it be early in the morning, you will have as cogent a proof of the accuracy of Tennyson's observations of nature as heart can wish, for you will find

> "Calm and deep peace on this high wold,
> And on these dews that drench the furze,
> And all the silvery gossamers
> That twinkle into green and gold."

To-day, the gossamer has gone until next morning, but peace, deep and still, broods over this high wold, and as I stroll towards the highest point and turn myself about to look down upon the village, I feel that I utter no irreverence when I say that it is good for me to be here. The common, dotted with furze, slopes softly towards the village of Harpenden. *Haerpendene*, the valley of nightingales: it is a sweet old name for a truly pretty spot, and one that is still accurate; for the nightingale sings here in his season, as he did, I doubt not, ten thousand years before the Anglo-Saxon gave the valley its name. From the architectural standpoint Harpenden is now a conglomeration of the picturesque and the unsightly, of the old and the new, its general aspect being charming enough, if only by reason of its broad street, and the many grand old trees both in and around the village. Thank Heaven, there are no races today, and the horsey man, the tipster, the cockney and the coster are not here to mar "'Arpenden" by their rowdy dissonance! Indeed, the silence is almost perfect as I pass down the village from south to north, for the heat is great, and little brown-legged children seem content to sit quietly in cottage doorways or to loiter around the pond and under the shelter of the limes and elms and chestnuts. Perhaps the coolest spot is the precinct of the church of St. Nicholas, where the small graveyard is shaded on the south and east by houses. The

church was originally a cruciform structure, late Norman, or Romanesque, said to date from the days of Stephen, and was a chapel-of-ease to Wheathampstead prior to the year 1859. The structure consisted of nave, chancel and transepts, with unusually narrow aisles, and an unusually low, central tower: the present battlemented tower is at the west end of the church, and the plainly mullioned window over the western door is set in stonework already considerably dilapidated. After the church was in part destroyed by fire, possibly when Yorkist and Lancastrian were endeavouring to annihilate each other, the Norman windows were built up with unsightly masonry and the chancel became a Perpendicular structure of no great beauty. A clerestory was formed at first in Norman fashion; but this was superseded by one of debased Perpendicular design, more than three centuries ago. The body of the church was rebuilt in 1862, in early Decorated style, the structure being inadequate to the spiritual necessities of the neighbourhood. There are some pretty cottages, with well-tended gardens, by the south entrance to the church, and I am not sure whether the sacred or the secular buildings are more suggestive of ease and retirement.

Mr. Ernest Gibbs, in a paper contributed some years ago to the *Herts Advertiser* under the *nom de guerre* "A Wandering Quill," mentions many interesting facts touching this village of Harpenden. He tells us that the little greenswards in the village were once used as rope walks, that the furze from the common was the cottager's fuel throughout the winter, and is "the poor man's door mat, and with it he thatches the little shed in which he keeps his tools and his rabbits." He has something to say, too, about the road which Mr. Cussans believes was formed by the Romans to lead from Verulam through Harpenden to Luton. "In a field near Pickford Mills a Roman sarcophagus was discovered in the centre of a large tumulus, in the year 1827. For some time the coffin, which had probably contained the ashes of some rich Roman patrician

or officer of high rank, was turned to ignoble use as a cistern in a neighbouring farmyard, but it was rescued from its low estate and removed to the British Museum, where it is now to to be seen. Other objects have also been found in the neighbourhood demonstrating that the conquerors of the world had a small station somewhere in this vicinity." Alas for resolves! I promised, when a couple of miles away, to forget the Roman and his ways, and here I am raking up his records and turning over his rubbish heaps again. Why cannot we let their ashes rest?

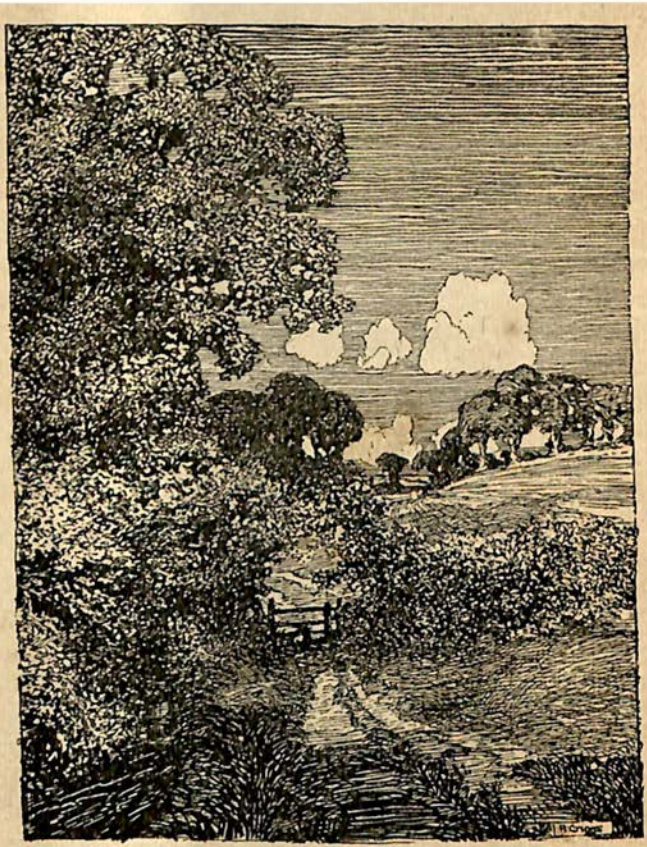
Well, if I am in a retrospective mood to-day, and prone to pore upon the conjectures of learned men, I had better follow my inclination to the top of its bent. I will dabble with an antiquity which does not belie its name, and the Roman who, as I wrote at Great Gaddesden, is but of yesterday shall be ignored.

With some such intention uppermost I have wandered again across the common, and have thrown myself down upon the turf at a spot where I have a good view of the whole valley of Harpenden. Here will I hob-nob with conjecture. Looking to my left I see again the tree-tops of Rothamstead; to my right, in the direction of Wheathampstead, green grassland and golden cornfields swell upwards and eastwards; but I am chiefly thinking of the long valley that stretches before me and of a chapter in the romance of geology which is connected therewith. For this valley of Harpenden was once parted by a large river, which flowed from the neighbourhood of Luton in a south-easterly direction, and slowly but surely, century after century, cut a lower bed for itself in the solid stratum of chalk and, as Mr. Gibbs puts it, left its signature behind in the shape of deposits of river gravels. These deposits are sometimes, as in the Bowling Alley, a little eastwards from the village, over forty feet in thickness, and it needs no geologist to guess that such deposits were not laid down in a night. Here steps in conjecture. We know that such a river must have flowed through

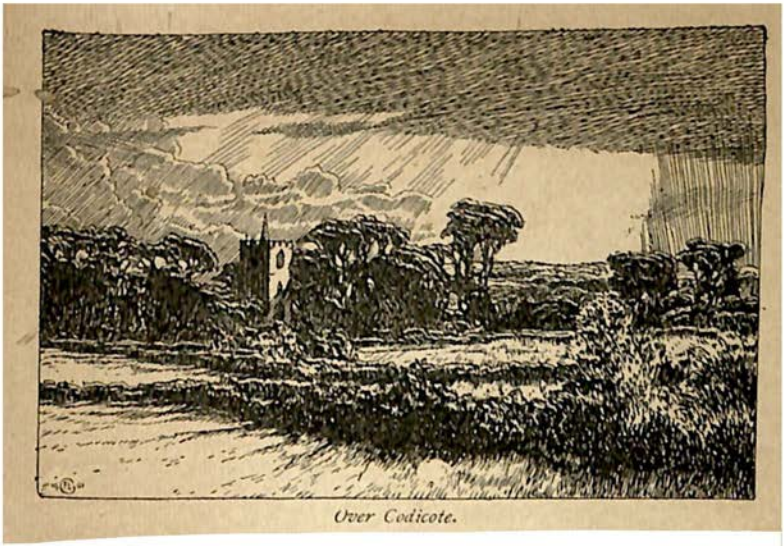
this valley for an eternity, but how may that eternity be measured? How long ago was it when perhaps several tributary rivulets first met together some miles to the north in post-Pliocene days, brought their united weight and motion to bear upon the chalk and set attrition at work among the flints? It may safely be set down as a hundred times as long ago as the date assigned for the first appearance of man by the orthodox. Darwin writes in an impressive passage: "We can best gain some idea of past time by knowing the agencies at work, and learning how deeply the surface of the land has been denuded, and how much sediment has been deposited. . . . Therefore a man should examine for himself the great piles of superimposed strata, and watch the rivulets bringing down mud . . . . in order to comprehend something about the duration of past time, the monuments of which we see all around us. . . . Nothing impresses the mind with the vast duration of time more forcibly than the conviction thus gained that subaërial agencies which apparently have so little power, and which seem to work so slowly, have produced great results." The formation of forty feet of gravel by the action of running water is so great a "result," that we may safely conjecture that the river which laid the gravel in this valley of Harpenden was doing its work far back in those days when England and France were as one continent, when herds of mammoths and gigantic deer roamed over the continuous prairies of this land, when the hippopotamus wallowed by the riverside and the lion lay in wait for its prey on spots now covered by our banking houses or cathedrals. So far as I can ascertain our river gravels were all laid down during post-Pliocene times, and those times, which followed what we call the Tertiary period, are believed to have commenced not less than *half a million years ago!*

Descending from my "specular mount," I pass through the village again, and find occasion to echo that complaint of Wordsworth, "the things which I have seen I

now can see no more." Passing *The Old Red Lion* and *The Old Cock Inn* I turn about and look back down the High Street, only to find that the view, which once afforded a glimpse of the common stretching onwards and upwards towards St. Albans, is now shut in by a convex crescent of shops on Church Green, and that, on the whole, the picturesque is being elbowed out of Harpenden at the instigation of the utilitarian.



A Meadow Path.



Over Codicote.

CHAPTER VIII

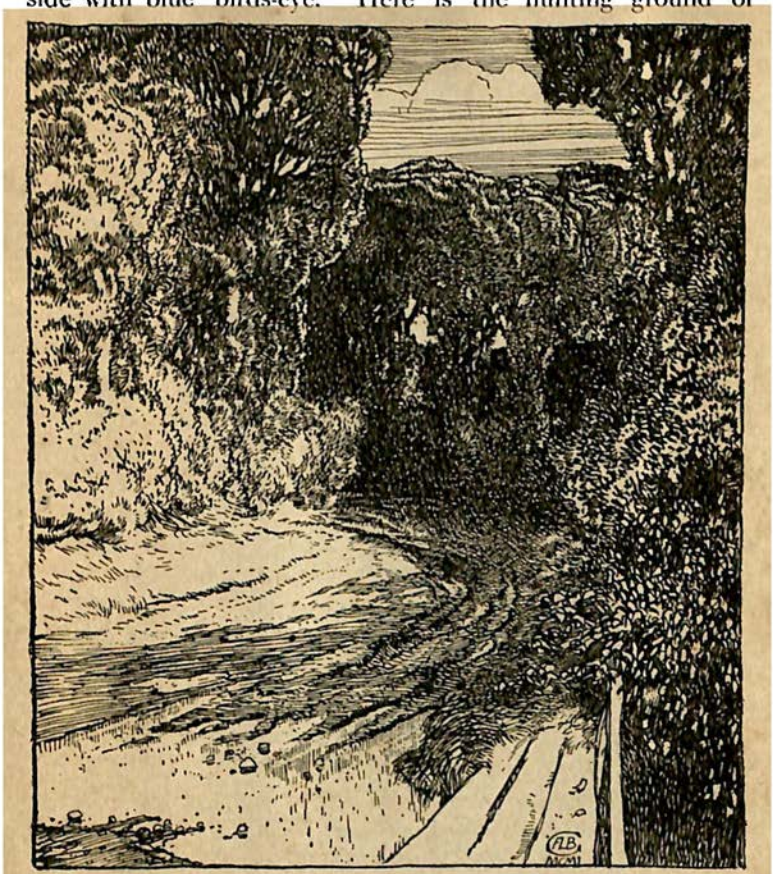
KIMPTON, WHITWELL, ST. PAUL'S WALDEN, KNEBWORTH

I CROSSED the bridge over the Great Northern Railway near Harpenden early this morning, and came down into a pretty stretch of country in the valley of the Lea, where I am loitering still, and looking around for matter meet for this journal of an itinerant. White roses are peeping in at the upper windows of some cottages by the riverside, and a luxuriant vine clings gracefully above the doorway of the wayside inn. Here the shallow wavelets of the Lea ripple cheerily over their pebbly bed; water scorpions are diving busily among the weeds, and shoals of sticklebacks, clad in coats of many colours, "in crystal eddies glance and poise." Eastwards from the wooden handbridge stretch the watercress beds; there the herbage beside the stream is of taller growth, and the water creeps more sluggishly towards Batford Mill. Little is to be heard as I saunter up the lane towards Bower Heath, saving the sound of the reaping machine among the tares, and the voices of men at work with the elevators in a farther

field. The lane winds upwards until I come to a field where shocks of oats are browning in the fierce heat, and a few wood pigeons are doing a little gleaning upon the sly. There is nothing to detain me on Bower Heath, from whence the country falls away softly on all sides, on the west towards Hide Mill, where the Lea enters the county from Bedfordshire, on the south towards Harpenden. South-east lie Mackery End and Gustard Wood; to the north are Little Cuts and Peter's Green; the lanes that lead north-east will take me to the village of Kimpton.

One often hears the praises of Devonshire lanes, and they are worthy to be praised; but you need not travel two hundred miles from town in search of such. In Hertfordshire are quiet winding lanes that stretch mile after mile beside fields of corn and rich grass-land, where Nature has done her best to please the eye of her lover. They lead you into valleys unawares; for often the hedges, festooned with honeysuckle or traveller's joy, tower high above your head and only a gate or gap reveals the farther prospect. They lead you along the sides of wooded slopes, where the cuckoo calls whilst daylight lasts, and the "nettle-creeper" knows each step you take. They lead you into hamlets or villages suddenly, for sometimes, as at Flamstead, Kimpton and Peter's Green, you see hardly a house until you find that the lane has opened out at right angles with the village street. Some such lanes in Hertfordshire are so narrow that there is but room for one to tread their path; others are wide enough for the wheels of the harvest cart, which often wends homewards between high hedges which catch the outer straws, and keep them pinioned there for many weeks. I am going towards Kimpton by an erratic route—a grass-grown track, a wilderness of wild flowers not often trodden. It needs no "Pathfinder" to know how few are the feet that tread this lane, for here, on its stony centre, hundreds of oxeye daisies struggle for possession of the soil, and on either side, just

where the foot would often fall, pimpernels peep pertly among the yellow heartsease and shepherd's purse thrives side by side with blue birds-eye. Here is the hunting ground of



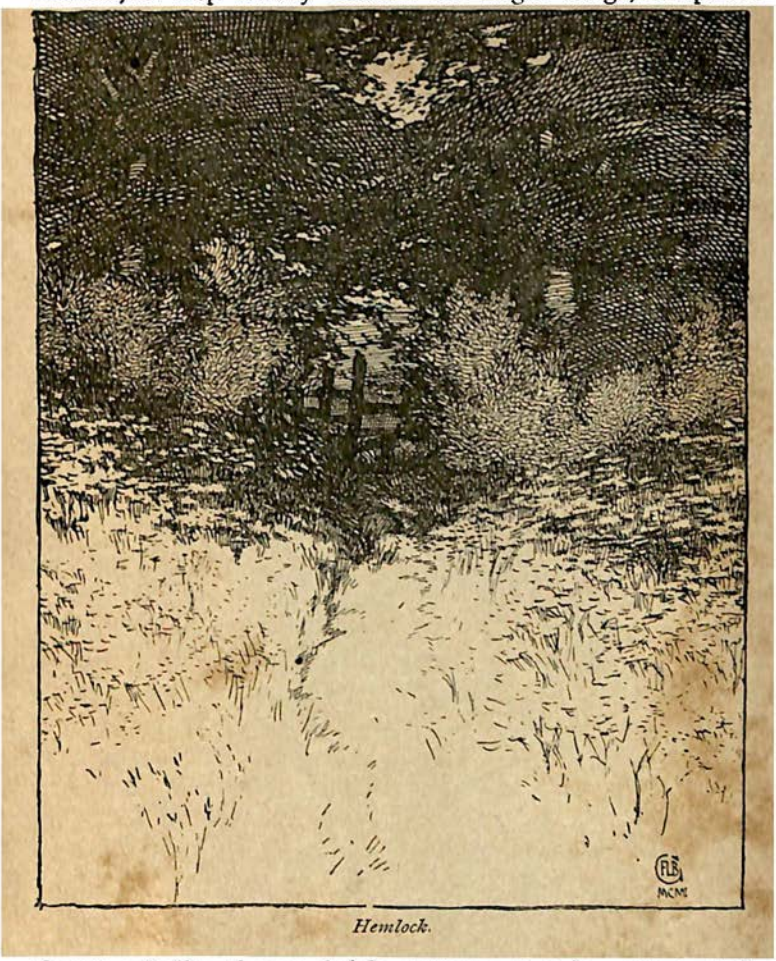
A Hertfordshire Lane.

many butterflies—small coppers, more scarce, I think, than formerly, and perhaps destined to that extinction which has overtaken their larger relatives, once so plentiful in the fen counties; large heaths, feeble flutterers in the sunshine easily

captured and so common as to claim scant attention from the collecting entomologist; delicate, sylph-like blues, brimstones, clouded yellows, small tortoise-shells, walls, and, in the autumn months, the stately red-admiral and the large-eyed, prouder peacock.

Sometimes, in these Hertfordshire lanes, you may see a vagrant man or woman tending a fire of driftwood by the wayside. Over the fire a small can or iron pot is suspended from three sticks, and in that primitive gipsy-cauldron a few handfuls of beans or peas are boiling. Such wanderers will usually tell you their story civilly, if they think that you also are a saunterer, a sort of amateur Zingari, with no desire to hamper their liberty. They are often tramps on their way from Liverpool to London, who turn into the less frequented byways to eat the simple fare which they have begged from houses by the high road; but are sometimes less honest folk, who have robbed a garden on the outskirts of town or village and have brought their stolen food where they are not likely to be disturbed. They often choose a spot where the lane twists sharply round, and if the contents of their pot are stolen a child is set to watch on either side to prevent surprise. They tread down the nettle or the hemlock, they thrust aside the bramble or the briar, and soon a few sticks are blazing merrily under the shadow of the high hedge. I remember how, on one occasion, I came suddenly upon such a scene in that lane which leaves the Redbourn Road at the north-west end of St. Albans, and turns and winds for about two miles until it opens out into the Harpenden Road near Childwick Bury. A man had lit his wayside fire amidst such a dense shelter of brambles and overhanging hazel that I knew nothing of his proximity until the smell of charring wood betrayed his presence. Such persons are sometimes met in any part of England; but they are seen most frequently in the home counties as they converge from all points in their common journey towards London.

I have taken an unconscionable time to reach Kimpton Bottom, so step briskly towards the larger village, composed



Hemlock.

almost wholly of new brick cottages at this western end. There is one exception, a truly venerable homestead close to the roadside, with a roof of deep thatch, tiny leaded windows,

and a lamp-post just outside which looks as though fashioned from a scaffold-pole. Beauty and utility share the narrow garden between them, for phlox and snapdragon make a brave show among the parsley and potatoes. Long gardens, bright with asters and chrysanthemums, stretch before many homes in the village street, and fruit trees, heavily laden, climb the front or overhang the porch. Near the forge stands a small room "*Erected for the benefit of the men of Kimpton by Susan Lady Dacre, April* 15, 1879." The Dacres have long been honoured as the owners of the beautiful estate called The Hoo, the park of which reaches almost to the village church. I do not intend to linger in that park, for I must get to Whitwell soon; but lunch being necessary to travellers I cool myself awhile in hospitable shades, profit by the Baconian precept "he that questioneth much shall learn much," and feel how true are Hazlitt's words touching the pleasure of putting aside your personality for awhile and becoming merely "the gentleman in the parlour." Hazlitt, on one such occasion at Llangollen, refreshed his soul with the *Nouvelle Héloïse*. Here, on the table of the inn parlour, lie *Rob Roy*, and *Ten Weeks in Natal;* but I must thrust these books aside and attend to my own.

When William the Conqueror distributed his newly acquired properties among his personal friends he gave the manor of *Kamintone*, now called Kimpton or Hockinghanger, to his half brother Odo, son of Herlwin of Conteville, whom he had illegally thrust into the bishopric of Bayeux. The manor had previously been held by Alveva, the mother of that Earl Morcar who was present among the Saxon nobles when William received them at Berkhampstead. Odo let the manor to one Ralph, a man of whom we know nothing save that he was thus the squire of Kimpton in those early days. According to Domesday Book this village of Kimpton in the half hundred of Hiz (Hilchin) consisted then of a few cottages, presumably close to the house or hall of Ralph, and was inhabited by two

Hoo End, Kimpton.

Frenchmen, twelve villagers, twelve bordars, three cottagers and five bondmen. The manor afforded pasturage for six oxen and "pannage" for eight hundred hogs, and was valued at twelve pounds. Standing close to the parish church and looking down the village street, it is not easy for me to go back in fancy to those days of primitive civilisation, when the expanse of rolling meadows and cornfield which now stretches away from Kimpton on all sides was covered, for the most part, with tangled, sombre forest, thick set, as that word "pannage" proves, with venerable oaks, some of which had put forth their leaves in due season since the days of Egbert. Space for a few cottages was cleared gradually; day after day the bondmen tended the hogs of Ralph beneath the oaks; the bordar, as his duty was, looked to it that birds or eggs were provided for the table of his lord. Ralph doubtless saw that he received his pound of flesh, for he was but secondary landlord, and my Lord Bishop of Bayeux was not the man to let the manor of *Kamintone* for a meagre rent. Humble as the manor was it was suitable enough to the requirements of the Saxon, whose race "disliked cities and walled places," and were glad, whenever peace permitted, "to settle down upon these clearings in their homesteads, with the central hall, the cottages of the kin, the slaves, and the cattle, and to live out their lives in quiet."

A chronicle of Kimpton would be largely a chronicle of its church. We know the names of the village vicars from William de Chetesley, instituted in the year 1239 under the patronage of the Prior and Convent of Merton in Surrey, down to the present day. Those names, some forty in all, are tabulated in Cussan's *History of Hertfordshire*, and perhaps one or two deserve a passing word. The first eleven vicars were appointed to the pastoral care of an earlier church, for the "parish church of SS. Peter and Paul" was not built until about the year 1400. It was during the vicariate of Lucas de Orpington, the third name on the list, that an Ecclesiastical Taxation was made at the instigation of Pope Nicholas IV., and the living of Kyming-

ton was then assessed at £16 13*s.* 4*d.* per annum. Thomas de Wheathamsted was instituted just fifty years before John de Wheathamsted became abbot of St. Alban's for the first time; but I cannot find any evidence of relationship between the two. William Thompson was vicar when, in the reign of Henry VIII., the living was again valued and estimated at £12 per annum, and he was still vicar when, some years later, the advowson came into the hands of Nicholas Bacon, father of the philosopher of Verulam, who granted it to Nicholas Bristowe, Esq. In the days of "Mr. John Young, Incumbent" (1650) the parliamentary Commissioners set down the living at an annual value of £60. William Barford, D.D., who was rector for twenty years, from 1773 to 1793, was a Prebendary of Canterbury, and, according to the tablet to his memory in the church, on the south wall of the aisle, a "man of consummate learning." There is also a tablet bearing the name of Charles Chauncy, A.M., member of a well-known family in the county. He was curate of the parish for over thirty years and was descended from Chauncy, the historian of Hertfordshire. But of the Chauncys more must be said at Ardeley.

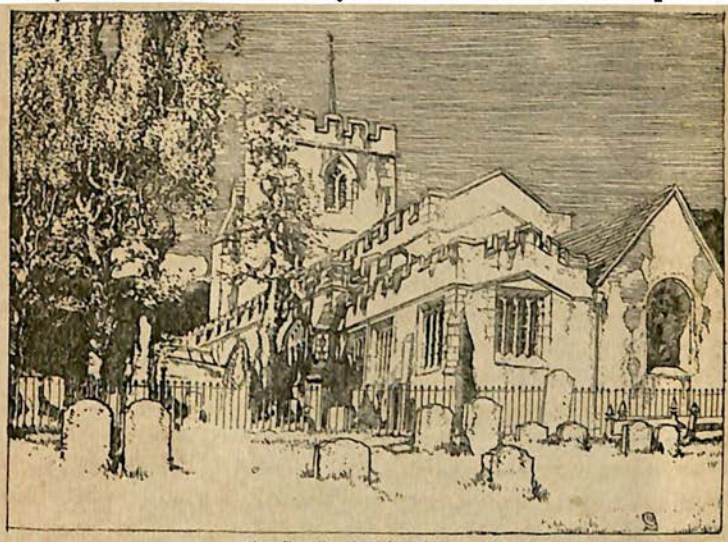
I have been studying my map this morning, and have decided to roam here and there between Kimpton and Hitchin in a manner which will look surprising enough when marked down on my route. Such an erratic course is unavoidable, for there are a dozen villages in this area which I wish to visit, villages which lie scattered at such inconvenient distances and angles that whatever route I follow, I must double and turn like a hare in order to see them all. So after climbing the long ascent out of Kimpton, I descend presently towards Whitwell, and enter the village from the direction of Bendish Hill.

Folks used to tell strange stories in the village of Whitwell, stories which can hardly be denied or verified, for the adventurers who figure in them are long since dead, as, indeed, are most of the narrators to whom I refer. Not the least

curious is a story which affords a singular proof that the same legend will penetrate in different forms to all parts of the earth. Readers of Mr. Andrew Lang's *Custom and Myth* and of De Quincey's article *My Brother Pink* will remember the story of the Goblin Woodcutter. Sometimes, just as twilight deepens in the Galapagos Islands, the sound of a woodman's axe may be heard in the forest. The sound of blows is continued for some minutes, when the crash of a fallen tree is plainly audible. Silence follows, and presently the axe is heard again. This astounding performance continues till daybreak, when, like other ghostly visitors, the woodcutter withdraws, but *leaves no timber behind him.* Some few years ago, in the pages of *Macmillan's Magazine*, Mrs. Edwards narrated how one morning, in a bungalow on the Allagalla Estate in Ceylon, she was awakened by the sound of somebody felling trees in the adjacent jungle. She at first supposed that the coolie was cutting firewood, but such was not the case, nor was any satisfactory explanation of the mystery forthcoming. Sahagun, a Mexican missionary, wrote a curious account of a similar occurrence. He tells us that when the Aztecs offered to their deity the gift of fragrant pine boughs on the hills at night they often heard persons felling trees with an axe. But the goblin woodcutter was never caught in the act, so his doings were attributed to the evil agency of Tezcatlipoca, the spirit who troubles the souls of men who travel by night. The story as told to me at Whitwell is of the same character. If you care to rise before the sun and to stroll quietly towards Bendish and Breechwood Green, you will hear the phantom woodman at his work, but however quickly you enter the thicket or copse whence the sound proceeds, you will find no woodman there, nor timber to betray his recent presence. Is it impossible that the legend was sedulously circulated a generation back by one or two unscrupulous coveters of their neighbours' firewood? We who remember that passage in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* which tells how and why Cassy frightened Legree until

he would sooner have put his head in a lion's mouth than enter a certain room, can perhaps see a glimmer of light shine through this misty legend.

Less misty, but more gruesome, legends were whispered, not so long ago, by cottage firesides. Stories they were of the doings of village patriarchs long since gathered to their fathers. I remember hearing how, in the dead of the night, a party of body-snatchers stole stealthily over the few fields that separate



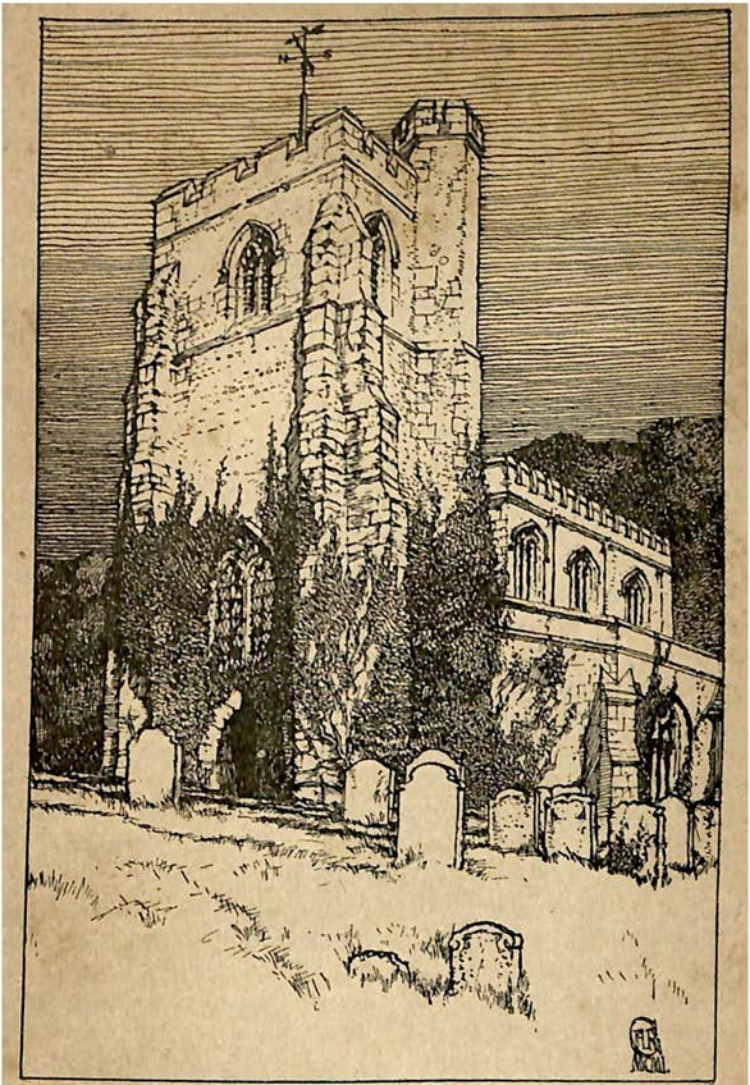
St. Paul's Walden Church.

Whitwell from St. Paul's Walden and there, from the newly filled grave under the shadow of the church of All Saints, took that for which, in those days which we are asked to admire, they could always obtain liberal payment from a conniving Sawbones. A man in this village once boasted that he had stolen the body of his grandmother—but perhaps I had better let the subject rest.

There are some old houses at Whitwell; one of them, at the sign of *The Eagle and Child*, bears the date 1747, and

there is a note by Cussans concerning this house which is worth quoting. In 1488 King Henry VII. granted the neighbouring manor of Stagenhoe—owned in Domesday by Ranulph the brother of Ilger—to Thomas Stanley Earl of Derby *in tail.* Cussans remarks: "A curious memorial of the connexion of this family with the manor of Stagenhoe still remains in the sign of a small alehouse at Whitwell, in this parish—*The Eagle and Child*—the well known crest of the noble house of Stanley. As the family held the manor for less than a century, dating from the year 1488, there can be little doubt but that this village alehouse has been established, and retained the same sign, for three hundred years, and possibly more." There are some old cottages too, down by the bridge over the Maran, and some queer little shops in the village street which have every appearance of being tended by the Tetterbys.

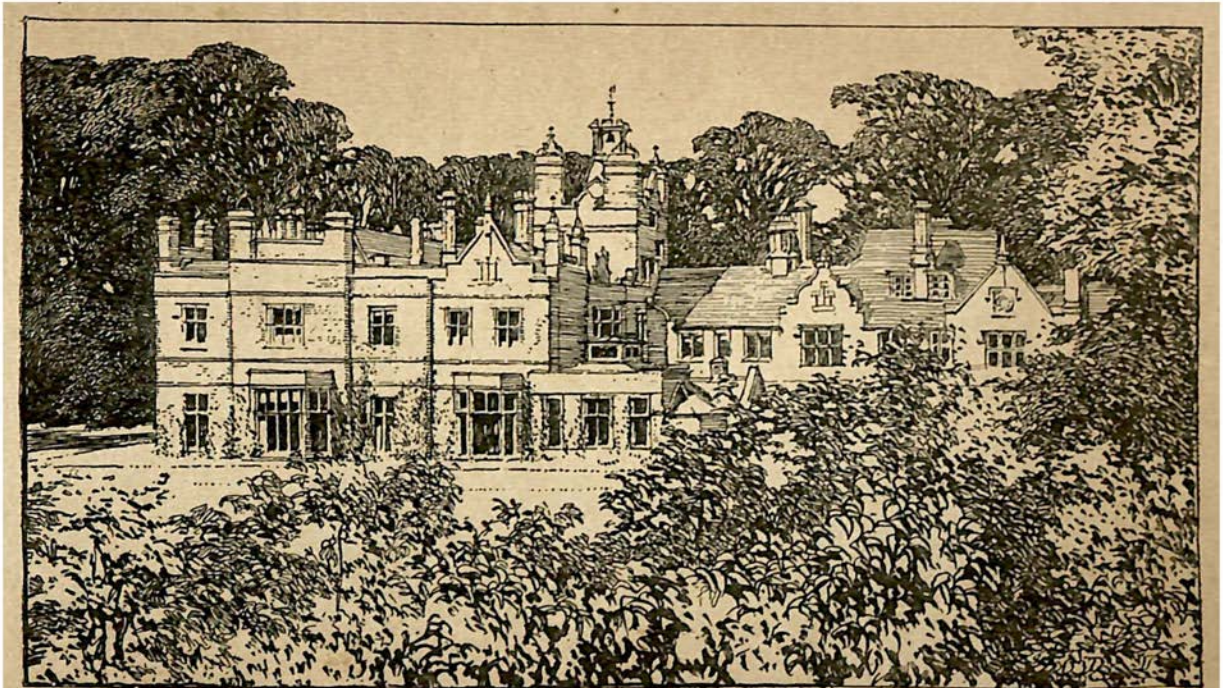
At the foot of Bendish Hill I turn in at an iron gateway and walk round the little church of St. Mary. For my most vivid memories of Whitwell I go back twenty years, to the days when a warm lover of Hertfordshire, himself a native of Berkhampstead, preached here each Sabbath morning and evening. He had studied at Berkhampstead Grammar School when Wilcocks was headmaster, a pedagogue who wielded a terrible cane. The Whitwell parson had preached in many Hertfordshire villages, for many solicited his services. He was a tall man of magisterial aspect, an excellent scholar, a man of versatile accomplishments—above all, an English gentleman. I see him coming from the vestry now, and remember his glance round upon the village worshippers, with most of whom he has wont to talk face to face as one talketh with a brother. I recall his manner when opening his subject, the wide knowledge of literature evinced by his illustrations, the adroit reasoning invariably displayed during the whole of his discourse. There must still be men in Whitwell who remember how, one evening in early summer a few weeks before his death, he preached a powerful sermon in which he depicted



King's Walden Church.

the plight of those mariners who, fearing lest they might fall upon the rocks near the coast of Melita, "cast four anchors out of the stern and wished for the day." When at Kimpton I thought of the learned Prebendary of Canterbury; and when I reflect what manner of man it was who laboured here, I find myself thinking that the inhabitants of these quiet villages are often better taught than many suppose.

I once had a rough brush with winter in this village of Whitwell. The memory of the great snowstorm of 1880 must linger in many minds. One morning I noticed how opaque the sky appeared; a feeling of increasing pressure was in the atmosphere; the birds became unwontedly familiar. Snow began to fall early in the afternoon; the flakes fell faster as darkness deepened, and piteously as the flakes which Dante watched in Hell. In the morning all sounds were muffled, all beings benumbed. The snow had drifted for hours before the wind, and had accumulated before cottages until, from roadway to roof-top, it formed one gradual slope. Hill and valley alike were wastes of whiteness. Men cleared a pathway through the village with difficulty; above St. Mary's Church, on Bendish Hill, they piled the snow on each side of their cutting, six to nine feet high. For weeks those long white walls glistened in the sun like some celestial city seen from the Delectable Mountains; but no strange faces peered from those crystal battlements upon a frozen world. Winter that year slew many a victim in the vicinity of Whitwell. Moorhens lurked, half paralysed by cold, among the poultry in the lower meadows by the river Maran; robins lingered at doorways and refused to be frightened. Companies of chaffinches flitted here and there half-heartedly, "indifferent in their choice to go or stay." Between Whitwell and King's Walden I picked up several blue titmice and wrens, frozen to brittleness. Our family sustained a loss. For some time we had cultivated, like Gilbert White, "some acquaintance with a brown owl." He had been caught in the woods near Stagenhoe and took his captivity with



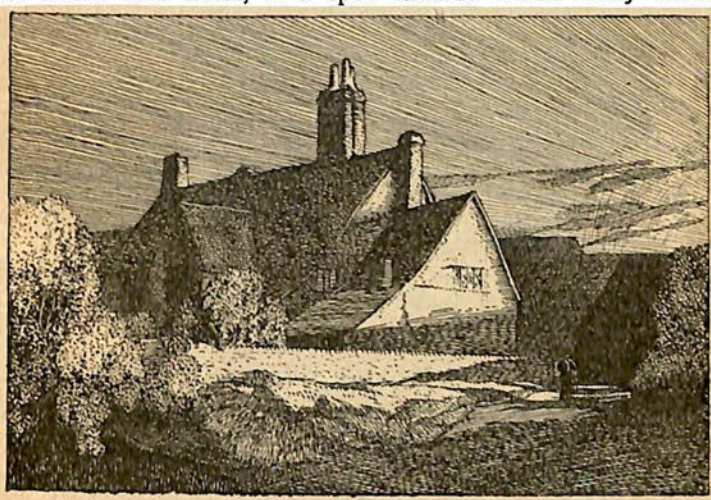
King's Walden Bury.

a bad grace. The Persian proverb tells us that when the owl boasts he boasts of catching mice at the edge of a hole. If so, that owl must have vaunted freely, for it took several hands to cater for his appetite, and we were wont to thrust poor mousey, dead or alive, through a hole in the rear of his prison. One morning when the cold was keener than ever we found him stretched out and at his last gasp. We strove to alleviate his sufferings by the fireside, but winter had the whip hand of him at last and he slept with his fathers. We handed him over to the taxidermist and he still looks down upon our doings from his "pride of place." Doubtless, in the Walhalla of Owl-land he boasts of his prowess in Hertfordshire in no measured strains.

The abbots of St. Alban's, who must have been rich beyond the dreams of avarice, counted the parish of St. Paul's Walden among their many possessions, for it was given to them by one Wulfgar in the days of Ethelred II. For this reason the parish was formerly called Abbot's Walden, whereas the property two miles to the north-west belonged to the Crown and was called King's Walden. The church at St. Paul's Walden stands to the left of the main road from Whitwell to Hitchin, on a rising knoll, and is now in the hands of the restorer. How can a man be expected to pluck the heart out of the romance of any spot whilst masons are watching him from the scaffold, and the tink, tink of the trowel is dinned into his ear persistently? Yet a church must tell a meagre tale indeed if there is nothing in it worth repeating, and a cursory glance around has shown me, on the west wall, the effigies of a man and woman kneeling at a *prie-dieu*, and of a child holding a skull in its hands. The effigy of the man, and a portion of the inscription beneath, perpetuate the memory of "Henry Stapleford Gent," who died in 1631 at the age of seventy-six. He was servant successively to Queen Elizabeth and to King James I. and Charles I. What a service! The mistress

headstrong, capricious, and almost uniformly haughty; the first master a sorry wit, an exacting, teasing experimenter in Kingcraft; the second a man of parts, but destined to ruffle men the wrong way as surely as the sparks flew upwards. Stapleford must have learned to tread gingerly on difficult ground, or he could never have served those monarchs as he did, "until ye time of his death."

Knebworth, where I arrive after a most circuitous ramble of about four miles, is a spot towards which many travel



Farm at Knebworth.

with feelings like those of the pilgrims of old, for it was the home of Bulwer Lytton, whose novels we have so often thumbed. The fine mansion in Knebworth Park stands on ground where a fortress held by Eudo Dapifer stood in the days of the Norman Conqueror, and where, when Henry VII. was King, Sir Robert Lytton, a Privy Councillor, began to build the spacious Tudor home which was completed by his descendants.

That home was a quadrangular structure, which good Queen Bess came down to see; one of its four wings was used in the construction of the present house and the other three were pulled down. I approach the house by way of a charming shrubbery; a rich, soft, afternoon sunlight falls upon the ivy-clad walls and mullioned windows, touching the whole building to beauty. White fantail pigeons are fluttering around the gateway of the new south wing, or strutting to and fro upon the lawn. Passing round the mansion to the west I get a wider view of its extent, and notice the central castellated tower, and cupolas, bluish to the eye, suggestive rather of a Moorish temple than an English home. Upon the parapet stand griffins, holding halberds before them. A gardener, the embodiment of civility, invites me to wander freely in the gardens, and I find that they are beautiful and spacious. The flower-beds—crescent and circle, parallelogram and square—are now one blaze of strongly contrasted colours, the light green foliage of the funchia serving as a foil to the scarlet fuschia, the many shades of chrysanthemum and dahlia being mingled among the varied tints of the lowlier verbena and heliotrope. Fountains, now quiescent, are beset with arum lilies. Statues of graceful women look calmly down upon this "trim parterre," or keep guard over the many alcoves and summer houses in the farther walks. Nor is a sterner background lacking, where pyramidal yews, drooping abies and fragrant pines cast their lengthening shadows across the gravel walks. Those walks lead me into strange, retired nooks, often revealing some trait of the owners of this old ancestral home. Such a trait is the marble monument near the rosery, surmounted by a vase of fragrant musk, and bearing the words "Here lies the Great Heart of A little Dog BUDGET Died 5 June 1886." For such an act of devotion the novelist himself set a precedent, erecting a small monument near one of the paths to the memory of a favourite dog. The inscription on that monument is marred by its misanthropic tone, but I will transcribe it:—

Alas! poor Beau.
(Died Feb. 28, 1852)
It is but to a Dog that this stone
is inscribed:
yet what now is left
within the Home of thy Fathers,
O Solitary Master,
that will grieve for thy departure,
or rejoice at thy return?
E. B. L.

A passage from the pen of Bulwer Lytton concerning his feelings in regard to his Hertfordshire home is to me so suggestive of what was greatest and best in the man that I venture to copy it here. "The place has something of the character of Penshurst, and its venerable avenues, which slope from the house down to the declivity of the park, giving wide views of the opposite hills, crowded with cottages and spires, impart to the scene that peculiarly English, half stately and wholly cultivated, character which the poets of Elizabeth's day so much loved to linger upon. As is often the case with similar residences, the church stands in the park at a bow-shot from the house, and formerly the walls of the outer court nearly reached the green sanctuary that surrounds the sacred edifice. The church itself, dedicated anciently to St. Mary, is worn and grey, in the simplest architecture of ecclesiastical Gothic, and, standing on the brow of the hill, its single tower at a distance blends with the turrets of the house, so that the two seem one pile. Beyond, to the right, half-way down the hill, and neighboured by a dell girdled with trees, is an octagon building of the beautiful Grecian form, erected by the present owner; it is the mausoleum of the family. Fenced from the deer is a small surrounding place planted with flowers—those fairest children of the earth, which the custom of all ages has dedicated to the dead. The modernness of this building, which contrasts with those of its vicinity, seems to me, from that contrast, to make its objects more impressive. It stands

out alone in the venerable landscape, with its immemorial hills and trees—the prototype of the thought of death—a thing that, dealing with the living generation, admonishes them of their recent lease and its approaching end. For, with all our boasted antiquity of race, we ourselves are the ephemera of the soil, and bear our truest relation, so far as our mortality is concerned, with that which is least old." In that mausoleum Bulwer Lytton expected to lie, as he has told us in the pages of *The Student*; but the dead belong to those who would do them honour and his worth decreed him a grave in Westminster Abbey.

A flight of wooden steps, overhung by laurels on each side, leads me to a small, railed enclosure, with a figured iron table in the centre and seats around it. Let me rest awhile in this still seclusion, if only to call to mind a few characteristics of the most famous master of Knebworth. It was here he gathered genial friends round him. Dickens, with his ever ready wit, came here to share in the theatricals enacted in that grand old banqueting hall—adorned with an Elizabethan screen of oak and wainscot panels by Inigo Jones; and from such entertainments arose the project for the relief of poorer artists which took shape at the inauguration of the "Guild of Art and Literature." Here would come robust, affectionate, industrious John Forster, ever a staunch friend, successor to Dickens on the *Daily News*, whose interest in his host's scheme of benevolence may be gauged by all who know his *Life of Goldsmith*, and who was destined, ere laid to rest at Kensal Green, to enshrine the memory of Dickens in one of the best biographies in our language. Here too came Douglas Jerrold, with meagre figure and thin, laughing lips, himself an actor and the son of an actor, to take a lion's share in the fun whenever it waxed fast and furious, and to set the table in a roar with the sallies of that wit which enlivened the pages of *Punch*. Here too came Maclise, who painted Sir Bulwer, illustrated the *Pilgrims of the Rhine* and painted that picture in his host's drawing room entitled "Caxton's Printing-office in the Almonry

at Westminster." Mark Lemon, who acted as Sir Geoffrey Thornside in Lytton's *Not so Bad as we Seem*, was also among those welcome guests, nor was he the least among the many worthies who from time to time came down to Knebworth Park. Those worthies often spoke of Lytton in their letters to one another. Once, in a letter to Forster from Gadshill, Dickens wrote: "Bulwer was in a better state at Knebworth than I have ever seen him all these years, a little weird occasionally regarding magic and spirits, but perfectly fair and frank in opposition. He was talkative, anecdotal and droll, looked young and well, laughed heartily and enjoyed some games we played with great zeal." This sociability of Lytton did not always evoke similar sentiments in others. In Sir George Trevelyan's *Macaulay* we read the historian's view: "Dec. 10th 1850. . . I met Sir Bulwer Lytton or Lytton Bulwer. He is anxious about some scheme for some association of literary men. I detest all such associations. I hate the notion of gregarious Authors. The less we have to do with each other the better."

I have said that Cowper's connection with Hertfordshire was little more than one of birth: it was far otherwise with Bulwer Lytton. Having represented St. Ives and Lincoln in Parliament, he was returned as member for Hertfordshire in 1852. His translations from Schiller were for the most part penned by him when travelling in his carriage between Knebworth and London; it was in a cottage by the lake, beyond the lime tree avenue, that he composed some of his most graceful, touching verses; and here, in this venerable home, much of his vigorous, melodramatic fiction was thought out and written. His many passages concerning the beauty of the young and lusty year suggest the fancy of a special sympathy with that season, sprung from the influences of his nativity; for, he writes:

> "It was the May when I was born;
> Soft moonlight thro' the casement stream'd;
> And still, as it were yester morn,
> I dream the dream I dream'd."

But the dream of a great literary reputation did not come to Lytton at Knebworth or in his boyhood; for although his mother—"sole heiress and last descendant of the Lyttons of Knebworth, in the county of Hertford"—had early taught him the love of books, it appears, from his own confession, he was almost a man when, lingering one day beside Lake Windermere, his ambitions began to take definite shape and to urge him to climb, like the youth in Beattie's poem, "the steep where fame's proud Temple shines afar."

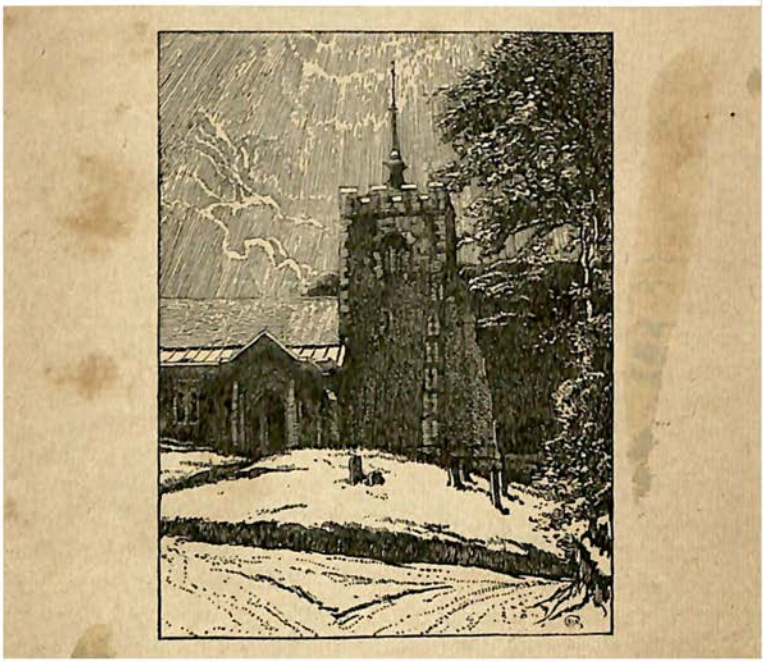
I reach the church of St. Mary, "worn and grey" through the lych-gates erected "To the Glory of God and in Memory of The Honourable Elizabeth Charlotte Villiers." Roses, white and red, and masses of Virginia creeper overhang the porch. Near that porch is the headstone erected by the novelist to the memory of Sarah Etteridge, for many years "his Mother's Honest Servant and faithful friend"; and in the next grave lies one who for nearly sixty years had served the family. Within the church the roof is of plain wood; the walls of the nave are decorated with a red "dado," and carved oak panelling beneath.[1] Many Lyttons lie at rest in the little chapel north of the chancel; and there is a brass to Charles Buchanan Pearson, Prebendary of Salisbury Cathedral, and for thirty-six years Rector of Knebworth. He died in 1881. An exceptional incitement to piety is placed upon the south side of the nave, where I notice a curious inscription: —"The following is an extract from the will of William Johnson Esq., late inhabitant of the Parish of Knebworth viz.:—'I give and bequeath to the Rector and Churchwardens for the time being of the Parish of Knebworth and their successors the capital sum of One Hundred Pounds three per cents Consolidated Bank Annuities, upon trust, to receive the interest and Dividends thereof, as the same shall grow due, and pay distribute and divide such interest and Dividends yearly

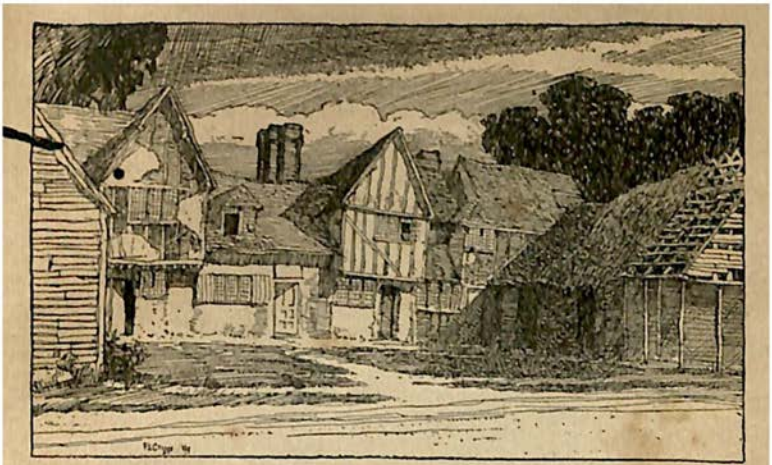
[1] Concerning this 'dado,'—so conspicuous to the eye and so near a mortuary chapel filled with sacred memories—the less said the better.

on the 30th day of January in every year unto and among Eight poor House Keepers who are inhabitants of Knebworth aforesaid, AND MY WILL IS THAT THOSE WHO CONSTANTLY ATTEND DIVINE WORSHIP SHALL HAVE THE PREFERENCE."

Daylight is dying fast, for the sun has almost "stretched out all the hills" as I cross the open, breeze-swept stubble-land between Knebworth and the town of Stevenage. I will sleep in Stevenage to-night and rise with the lark in the morning. Meanwhile, the quiet spirit of approaching night and the soft twitterings of the birds as they seek their rest may well renew the heart of any man, and I come out at length upon the Great North Road eager for further journeying. Eager, too, for some fresh reminiscence or romance of the road; nor need I go down into Stevenage unsatisfied. For here upon my right, on the very edge of one of the most famous coaching roads in old England, six large, grass-grown mounds stand side by side at about equal distances on the hill top. Now a house which stands near the northernmost mound is called "Danes-hill," a name which reminds me that these six hillocks are considered to be barrows of Danish origin. There was a fight, as is supposed, and here the warriors heaped the earth above their slain in a manner common to almost every kindred and tribe in primitive and even later times. But is the supposition correct? These barrows have been opened, but no human remains were discovered. Antiquarians agree that they are of great antiquity; the rest is conjecture. And, as usual, conjecture has shaped itself into legend, and the story told in the neighbourhood as to the origin of these six mounds is of truly Mandevillian savour. The devil was at the bottom of it all. One night, presumably in lack of more mischievous employment, he went into the woods near Stevenage, and taking from thence a shovelful of earth he walked to the lower end of the town and threw it down by the road-side. He found this exercise so diverting that he repeated his journey again and

again, each time bringing earth in his shovel from the woods and placing it near the same spot. And so the six hills stand here to-day, tangible proofs of the story's truth; and a seventh would stand here too were it not that the Father of Sin, as he was stalking along with his last shovelful, met a person of such ardent piety that he forsook his labours and fled. Yet if any reader questions the truth of this story he may walk in the woods near the town of Stevenage and search diligently until he finds, as others have found before, the seven holes from which the shovel of the Evil One lifted those mounds of earth. Earlier generations have considerately left those holes unfilled "to witness if I lie."





Cottages at Titmore Green, recently demolished.

CHAPTER IX

STEVENAGE, PRESTON, TEMPLE DINSLEY, GREAT OFFLEY

I CAN cast but a casual glance around Stevenage, or I may prove a laggard at last through attempting too much. Moreover, I claim to share the prerogatives of my fellow peregrinators and to go where I please; so for a day or two I will spend most of my time in those quiet villages and byways which I have already marked out, and concerning which the guide books say but little, although there is often much to say. But I cannot quite ignore this little town on the Great North Road, so having planned my goings to my satisfaction I have wandered out this morning as far as to the six hills. There was one who must have often passed this way concerning whom I would gladly learn more; but his doings seem to be little known. Henry Boswell, who, as tradition states, was called the "King of the Gipsies," was born near these six hills of Danish or Satanic origin, and, dying at ninety years of age in the year 1780, lies beneath the nave of the little Norman church at Ickleford. In the *Annual Register* for 1773, we read

that the clothes of "the late Diana Boswell, Queen of the Gipsies, value £50, were burnt in the Mint, Southwark, by her principal courtiers, according to ancient custom." Queen Elizabeth, the wife of Henry Boswell, died in 1782 and was buried beside the King, but the identity of the surname and the fact that the two lives so nearly synchronised can leave small doubt that the King and Queen were relatives. I may note in passing that many bands of gipsies have a king or queen; one of these monarchs—no greater man, perhaps, than Henry Boswell—was buried near the grave of Athelstan in Malmesbury Abbey.

Had Rip Van Winkle fallen asleep once upon a time in Stevenage, and awoke after a short nap of, say, twenty years, he would have found that the town had shifted whilst he slept. For Stevenage, in days long passed, stood near to the church of St. Nicholas, now half a mile away; but a large number of houses were destroyed by fire and a new town was gradually built to the south-west, on either side of the Great North Road. And the town was just such an one as is dear to the hearts of Englishmen,—a town where all sorts and conditions of men lived almost within a few yards of one another, a town through which the coach rattled merrily on its way from the *Grayhound Inn* at Smithfield to the *Sun* at Hitchin or the *Swan* at Bedford. The town received its visitors of worth, as towns are wont to do, and had its incidents and escapades, once talked of much, but now fast receding down the dusky avenue of time. Jobs were done here too as in other towns. In the year 1538 Richard Borcham de Stevenache became the 40th and last Abbot of St. Alban's, elected only to be dismissed by Royal mandate in the following year—and solaced with a Royal pension of £266 13*s.* 4*d.* per annum. One day in the year 1810 the letters for Stevenage never reached the town, being stolen from the mail in the neighbourhood of Barnet, much to the chagrin of Tom, Dick and Mary Jane, to say nothing of tradesmen or local gentry. The *White Lion* is

said to be the oldest inn in Stevenage; the *Baldock*, the *Boston*, the *York High-Flyer*, and other coaches drew up

Near Stevenage.

before its door to change their teams; the wisdom and the wit of Stevenage were exercised in its largest room, for there

the sessions and the vestry held their meetings, and there, one night each year, a dance was held to celebrate the finish of the Fair. *The Swan*, now an inn no more, was visited by Sir Thomas Lawrence, who painted the likeness of his host, thinking, perhaps, as he did so, of his early skill at the *Black Boar* in Bristol, where, at the age of six, he sketched his father's guests and recited Milton. And at *The Swan*, on the 21st of June, 1814, died Sir Gilbert Elliot, first Earl of Minto, the friend of Hume, of Burke, and of Mirabeau, and Governor-General of India.

On the 15th day of October, 1724, a curious will was proved in the Archdeaconry of Huntingdon. The execution of that will led to some equally curious doings, for its provisions were strictly obeyed. It appears that Mr. Henry Trigg, a grocer of Stevenage, had opinions of his own as to the manner of his burial—in fact, he declined to be buried at all. His will declared that he committed his body to the west end of his hovel, where it was to be decently laid upon a floor prepared by his executor "upon the purlin." So the body of Henry Trigg was enclosed in a coffin and the coffin placed upon the rafters of the said "hovel" or barn, and the number of persons who have gone on pilgrimage to see that coffin speaks volumes for the curiosity of mankind. Just now, as I retraced my steps towards the six hills, I passed the *Old Castle Inn*, which was owned by Henry Trigg, and where you may still be shown the rafters in the barn upon which his bones long rested. I have been told that they are there now, and, as I never pry into the concerns of other people, have replied that it is very likely. There are houses in the High Street that seem old enough to have looked down upon that grocer whose coffin was to become so famous throughout the county. Here are some red-tiled cottages, with plaster fronts, and shutters fastened back upon the wall; the roof of one has warped from its original slope and its dormer windows, unable to sit upright and look the passer squarely in the face, have nodded

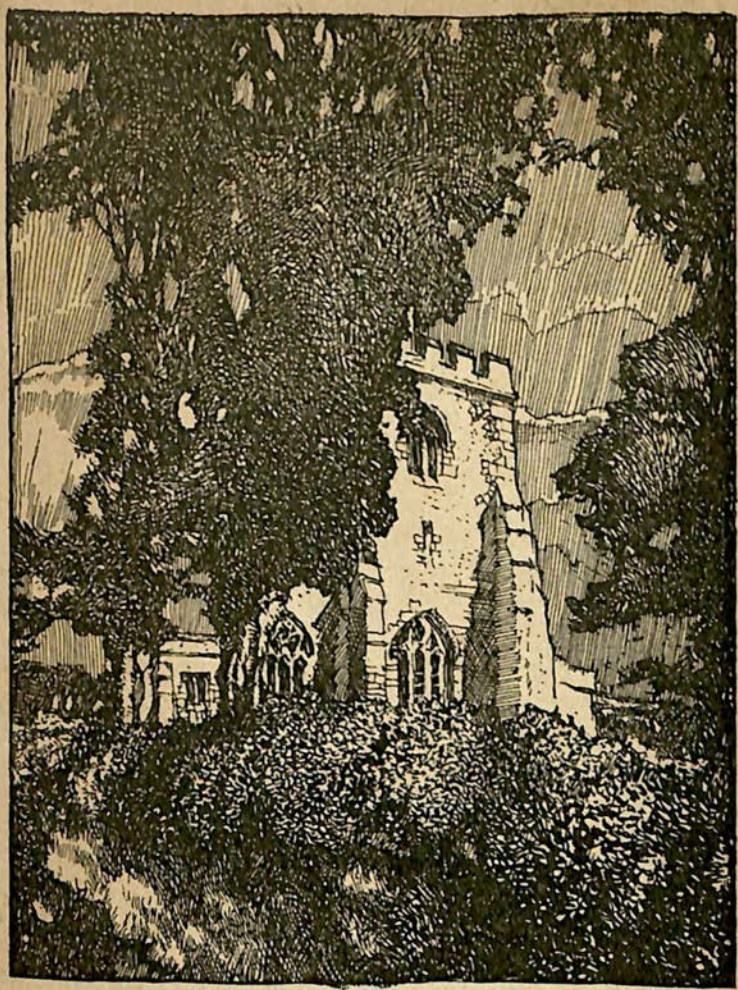
until they turned half over and fell asleep upon the roof. Other houses, of truly venerable, and diverse architecture, could tell an interesting story. But good and bad, wheat and tares, have grown together since the fall of man; walls have the keeping of strange secrets, and perhaps it is as well that they are dumb.

I have before me at this moment a photograph of a drawing. That drawing represents a man seated upon the floor of a hovel; he is naked save for a blanket pinned round his shoulders; he leans his right elbow upon his knee and rests his chin upon his right hand. Upon the floor lie a couple of spirit jars, a wine bottle, and a loaf of bread; the loaf is being devoured by two rats. A heap of ashes lies piled before the grate and a small saucepan is upon the hob. The picture might serve to illustrate the abomination of desolation; yet it is the record, not of an artist's fancy, but of plain and very sober fact. It is a picture of the hermit of Hertfordshire, whose history, so far as we know it, is wholly unique among contemporary narratives of life in England.

At a spot called Redcoat's Green, about two miles from Stevenage, there stood until about ten years ago the remains of Elmwood House. I drove past those remains a few years before, and was told that the house was famous in the county as the home of the hermit Lucas, who was visited by Charles Dickens. Moreover, I learned that Dickens, in a Christmas number of *All the Year Round*, wrote an account of that visit, an account which by many persons was regarded as highly coloured and inaccurate. The hermit is said to have denied that the novelist ever visited him at all. I remembered the hermit Lucas yesterday when at Whitwell, for he once lived in that village with a surgeon who bore the name of Hicks. Although he was then certainly not misanthropical, he was considered eccentric. He allowed his hair to grow uncut, rode his horse at unseasonable hours, and did many other things which "dazzled the crowd and set them all agape." But stranger things were to come.

Lucas, upon the death of his mother, in 1849, was much grieved, and watched beside her coffin until the law allowed him to do so no longer. Then he became a hermit, and a hermit he remained to the last. The servants at Elmwood House were dismissed. The windows were stoutly barricaded, the rooms were closed, and for twenty-five years James Lucas lived mostly in such a chamber as is portrayed in the picture before me. He lived amid indescribable filth, the companion of rats, a prey to the fear of robbers, an object of curiosity to every passer. His food was for the most part bread, his drink was milk; but he passed gin or wine through the bars of his hovel to such visitors as he deemed honest, and gave away many coppers to the needy. He studied a few volumes of surgery and medicine; but ignored the newspaper. He chatted with children when they ceased to fear him, or argued with older persons when he pleased. Meanwhile his ashes accumulated until they were with difficulty heaped on either side, and they formed his only bed for many years. The family estate as a whole, and Elmwood House in particular, had indeed fallen upon evil days. The house became dilapidated, the approaches were choked with weeds, his hay-rick rotted, his whole surroundings savoured of desolation and decay. And the hermit, as many have assured us, was meanwhile wholly confident that his mode of life was better than that of his neighbours, and that if cleanliness is next to Godliness, to be dirty is Godliness itself.

The hermit of Hertfordshire died on a Sunday morning, in April 1874. He was found stretched upon his ash-heap in an apoplectic fit; near him was a box filled with broken and mouldy bread, and immense quantities of such offal lay scattered upon the floor. The dying, loathsome man was carried to a neighbouring farmhouse; but despite every effort to restore consciousness he died soon afterwards. The appearance of Elmwood House at the time of the hermit's death was described by several who visited it. The rooms were repositories



St. Ippolyts Church.

of filth. Rafters had fallen in and lay across the beds, curtains had dropped upon the floor in very rottenness, the roofs were black with accumulated dust and hung with cobwebs. A bag was

found containing £8 10*s.* 0*d.*, and a box containing nearly £260. Charles Dickens had asserted that "Mr. Mopes" was surrounded by "a mist of home-brewed marvel and romance," and declared that the reasons alleged for the hermit's mode of life were so contradictory that "no consistent information was to be got." Nor has such information been since produced; but, so far as I have learned, it seems probable that James Lucas feared his relatives would rob him, and preferred voluntary to enforced privations. However that may be, his strange mode of life and uncanny home were once the subjects of considerable discussion; and pictures and photographs concerning the hermit Lucas appeared in the *Graphic*, *London Society*, and many other publications. He was also made the subject of a cheap book. He was buried in Hackney churchyard, near the ashes of his mother; and as he always gave more money to a needy Romanist than to a Protestant, we may yet live to find the name of James Lucas in some future edition of *Acta Sanctorum*.

From Stevenage to Preston is a walk of anything between four and six miles, for road and lane and footpath lead you hither, and, if you ask your way, you will probably find the directions given about on a par with those which Tony Lumpkin tendered to the younger Marlow. But the country through which you pass is fair to look upon, fair with that diversity so characteristic of Hertfordshire. Blue cornflowers look at me this morning from corners where they have escaped the foot of man or beast during the days of the barley harvest; a few jays, seen at intervals, serve to remind me that their numbers are fewer year by year; a kestrel is hovering over the tiny, triangular common near the thirtieth milestone from London, and, as usual, the small birds seem to know that he is near; the skylarks, once the kestrel is beyond their ken, resume their interrupted burst of song as I walk along the road towards Chapel Foot. Presently, on the hill top, I come to the ruins of Minsden Chapel, or, as Nathaniel Salmon calls

it in his *History of Hertfordshire* (1728), "the church at Menlesdene, a chapel of ease to Hitchin." That chapel, like King Charles II., was an unconscionable time dying; its period of decrepitude passed over it very slowly. In 1650 the commissioners reported that it had paid nothing to the vicar of Hitchin for many years and that it was even then in decay; and yet the last wedding celebrated within its walls was the wedding of Enoch West and Mary Horn in 1738. Many years before that marriage, in 1701, Daniel Skingle, who had been

Minsden Ruins.

ejected from the livings of Essendon and Little Hadham, was imprisoned at the instigation of Francis Bragge, Vicar of Hitchin, for having preached in Minsden Chapel, although but "a mere layman and in a lay habit,"—an excellent text for a discourse by Herr Teufelsdröckh. His presumption got another man in trouble, for John Heath, warden of Minsden Chapel, was made to apologise openly in Hitchin Church for having permitted such profanity to be enacted before him. More successful were the efforts of Thomas Oxenham, a

Calvinistic Dissenter, to preach the Word "faithfully" at Trunk House, close to these ruins of Mirsden Chapel, in the year 1820. He has told us of his efforts in his book *The Riches of Free Grace*, and mentions, among other things, that the house was "licensed," that an opposition had been organised to thwart him, led by a tuneful farmer who was to play "God save the King" upon the flute; but that the Word was preached with such power that the farmer was unable to perform his impious part.

A ramble of two miles from Chapel Foot brings me to a spot which is hallowed ground in the eyes of Nonconformists, for it is haunted by the spirit of John Bunyan. Near to the village of Preston and the ancient manor of Temple Dinsley is a natural hollow in Wain Wood, still called Bunyan's Dell. Here the Puritan dreamer and divine came often to preach, usually accompanied by friends from the chapel at Tilehouse Street in Hitchin. His days were at that time falling into the yellow leaf, but, as we know well, his vigour was unabated, as it remained to the day of that last merciful errand which led him, not quite an old man, to his grave in Bunhill Fields. We know that the people flocked to this spot from the surrounding villages and hamlets, to hear the Word of Life from the great preacher, who wrote about it wonderfully too. He spoke to those crowds, like Baxter, "as a dying man to dying men." It was the age of peasant belief. Religion was a different matter, then. As Froude has insisted, men feared the horrors of perdition and hoped for Heaven as they fear and hope no longer. The assurance that the elements shall one day melt with fervent heat and the heavens be rolled up as a scroll was to them no mere figure of speech. One can hardly rest here by the wayside, in a neighbourhood which Bunyan knew so well, and be heedless of his memory, or forget the power of his burning words. I see once more quaint portraits of the man, and remembering *The Pilgrim's Progress*, the *Holy War*, *Grace Abounding*, *Sighs from Hell*, *The Heavenly Footman*, and other books which I was early

taught to revere, I feel that in this world there is nothing stable. Consider Bunyan's influence in his day, and search for its present counterpart. An eloquent man, speaking to-morrow of death and of judgment to come, would draw a tear from none, saving perhaps a hysterical girl or woman. Bunyan preached to men who wept like children, and Whitefield, fifty years later, could stir rough, labouring men till the tears left furrows on their grimy cheeks. Religion has as many phases as philosophy, and more sects—embodiments of beliefs which germinate and grow and die away. Divines may argue as they will, but the faith which Bunyan nurtured lives not in England to-day. The page in the history of religious belief upon which he wrote his name has been turned over by the finger of Time, and the pages turned by Time are turned for ever.

Religion and warfare went hand in hand in the days of the Knights Templars, who once owned this Manor of Temple Dinsley at Preston, a manor so old that we read of other properties which belonged to it before the Norman Conquest. King William himself held "Deneslai," and in his day there stood upon the manor two mills, worth "sixteen shillings." The mill was an important part of the property of every manor, and the tenants—the bordar and cottager—were compelled to employ the mill on their lord's manor and that alone. Of the petty strife often waged between peasant and miller in olden times we have all read; and probably some of those stories have been handed down from sire to son for many generations, perhaps even from the days when mills mentioned in Domesday Book were still standing. We know, for instance, that the miller claimed his fist-full from each sack brought to his mill, and that the bonniest lasses—and married women, too, if young and pretty—were freely saluted on cheek or lip by the jolly miller when they brought to him their gleanings among the sheaves—he seems, indeed, to have usually been reputed a gallant of large license. But I am not concerned

with the history of our manor mills, except as a point of passing interest; and here, at the meeting of several ways, is the hamlet of Preston, and I soon forget the jolly miller and all his doings. It is one of those quiet afternoons in late summer when a man may well be thankful if it be his lot to linger in an English village, to watch the children playing on the green, and to find a shady seat before some cottage doorway where he may learn the history of the entire community from willing lips. In such fashion I have idled away an hour this afternoon, chatting with those persons who will chat with me, and finding, as one invariably does, that this village contains the social history of rural England in a nutshell. And I have afterwards bestirred myself and found things of interest which are more peculiar to the spot. I have noticed the tiny red-brick *Bunyan Chapel*, "an Ebenezer of the Foster family whose ancestors were associated with Bunyan and Preston," and have demonstrated my impartiality by going straight from thence to the local church as by law established and spending a few moments in the new building dedicated to St. Martin. It is a plain little sanctuary, like a thousand "mission churches" scattered through our land, with a slate roof and tiny leaded windows. There is, however, a large window of stained glass over the altar, of considerable beauty, representing the descent of Christ from the Shepherd King of Israel. King Solomon is there, and David, playing upon his harp; Jesse is seated beneath, leaning his head upon his hand. It is a pleasant enough picture to look upon in this quiet spot and may serve to remind you that, go where you will in this world, you can hardly avoid for long some memory of the romance of Scripture.

I have said that the manor of Temple Dinsley was once the property of the Knights Templars. It was some time during the twelfth century that those warrior-monks, the Brethren Knights of the Temple of King Solomon, came here and established a Preceptory, and here they remained until the bull

of Clement V. for the suppression of their Order was put in force in August, 1312, their estate was forfeited, and the Knights of the Hospital of St. John of Jerusalem in England reigned at Temple Dinsley in their stead. The little that we know of the history of the Knights Templars here is highly interesting. It was at the Paris Chapter, in 1147, that Bernard de Baliol bestowed upon them "fifteen librates of land near Hitchin," and I daresay they found their way down here soon afterwards to claim their own. It seems that their spiritual needs were ministered to by a chaplain drawn from the Benedictine Monastery at Elstow, who celebrated Mass on "Sundays, Wednesdays and Fridays in every week in the mornings, and vespers in the afternoons," and derived his stipend from corn-tithes paid to him by the knights. Their founder, who was Lord of the Manor of Hitchin, was grandfather to Hugh Baliol of Bernard's Castle, in the diocese of Durham; Hugh Baliol was father to Sir John, founder of Baliol College, Oxford; Sir John was in turn father to that John Baliol who quarrelled with Bruce for the throne of Scotland, and John was father to that Edward Baliol who in 1332 was crowned at Scone. In the recess of one of the windows of the north aisle of the parish church at Hitchin there lies the mutilated, featureless effigy of a knight in chain armour. It is the effigy of Bernard de Baliol.

Such memories were mine just now as I leaned against the fine elm near the well on the village green—an elm said to have been planted on the day when George III. was crowned. And, fortunately for me, a discovery was made a few days back which has set others thinking once again of the men who held this manor so long ago. Leaving the village green I obtained entrance to the private gardens of Temple Dinsley, and here, lying upon the ground near the house, in a spot shaded by pines and guarded by an effigy of Father Time with his scythe and hour-glass, is a large stone coffin-lid which was found by some workmen when digging in the grounds The coffin itself was

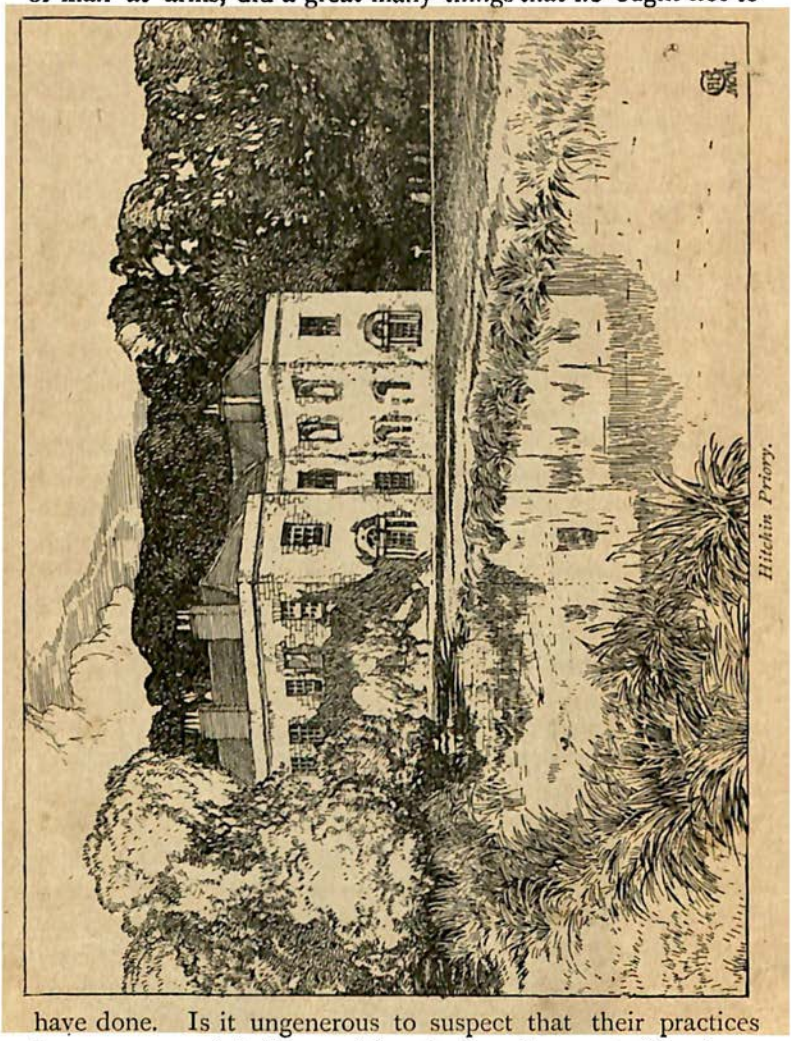
missing. On that lid is a finial cross upon a rod or staff, with a central disc and floriated extremities. Such monumental crosses were first cut into or relieved upon stone coffin-lids in England towards the end of the eleventh century, and this specific pattern was, I know, among the insignia of the Knights Templars; for, by an odd chance, the last time I opened *The Antiquities of Selborne* I read the following passage:—"But the chief pieces of antiquity are two narrow stone coffin-lids, which compose part of the floor, and lie from west to east. . . At present there are no coffins under them, whence I conclude they have been removed to this place from some part of a former church. One of these lids is so eaten by time, that no sculpture can be discovered upon it; or, perhaps, it may be the wrong side uppermost; but on the other, which seems to be of stone of a closer and harder texture, is to be discerned a discus, with a cross on it, at the end of a staff or rod, the well-known symbol of a Knight Templar."

I am glad that the romance of Hertfordshire is not confined to old wives' fables and lying legends, but is associated with Benedictine monks and nuns, and with the Knights Templars, of whom I shall think again when I reach Baldock. The finding of this coffin-lid in the garden at Temple Dinsley has reminded many that quite recently there was also found, near the same spot, a sculptured foot, covered with chain mail and wearing a spur; and these discoveries have set the villagers talking, and I find that no small interest is evinced by them in those stories which they have learned from time to time touching the history of this fine manor. I have been sitting by this old, old stone, once, perhaps, the slab which covered the body of a mighty man of valour, and have listened to all that the gardener has to tell me, feeling somewhat dispirited by reason of scanty knowledge. If only we could piece the fragments together into one coherent whole! Not far from where I am sitting is the mouth of a subterranean passage. It has been opened, as I am told, from time to time, but never thoroughly explored. The

story runs that it leads from here to Minsden Chapel, and that "once upon a time," a second passage ran from the Priory at Hitchin and met that from Temple Dinsley almost at right angles. One might take pen in hand and rival the romances of Mrs. Porter if one knew a little more; for the story of the Knights Templars is one in which the soldier and the devotee, the licentious and the chaste, the adventurer and the recluse are strangely mingled. One of three orders founded to defend the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem, they flourished for just two centuries, and their history is for the most part the history of the Crusades. They shared the awful privations of the march from Laodicea to Attalia in Pamphylia; they garrisoned the fortress of Gaza; they were foremost in the fight at Ascalon; they provoked the strife which was fought out at Hittin, when Saladin, having won the battle, ordered all the Templar prisoners to be put to death; they escorted the remnant of the Christians from Jerusalem to Tripoli; they were participators in the siege and famine at Acre, and in the building of the wave-washed fortress of Castle Pilgrim; they were a tower of strength to the Christian army at Damietta; they suffered in the rout at Jaffa; they drove the Teutonic knights from the walls of Acre; and they might have permanently established themselves at Jerusalem had not the Babylonian Sultan caused their final overthrow by engaging them in strife with the Khárizmians. And in much of this warfare the Templars of Temple Dinsley must have drawn the sword; some of them doubtless joined the standard of Hugh de Paganis when, after the Council of Troyes, he came to England to gather followers and to lead them to the Holy Land.

I have wandered out in spirit to the troublous East, and have almost forgotten to wonder whether the story of these subterranean passages in Hertfordshire is one of horror or of harmless follies. I know that the Knight Templar was commanded to eschew the kiss of women, and to keep himself unspotted from the world, but—well, I suppose he had his

share of human infirmities, and, whether knight, chaplain, or man at arms, did a great many things that he ought not to



Hitchin Priory.

have done. Is it ungenerous to suspect that their practices here were occasionally as wild as they are known to have been

elsewhere? True, the worst accusations against the Templars were largely furnished by Franciscan and Dominican monks, often, alas! proficient in the arts of mendacity, between whom and the Templars no love was lost; but they doubtless sadly belied their profession. Nameless sins were laid to their charge, especially in regard to the rites observed at their midnight meetings; it is perhaps enough for me to quote a few words from an exhaustive article by Mr. T. A. Archer: "In England the very children at their play bade one another beware of Templars' kisses. Stranger stories were yet rife in this country and gravely reported before bishops and priests, of children slain by their fathers because they chanced to witness the nightly orgies of the society; of one prior's being spirited away at every meeting of the General Chapter; of the great preceptor's declaring that a single hair of a Saracen's beard was worth more than the whole body of a Christian man. In France they were said to roast their illegitimate children and smear their idols with the burning fat." Let us hope that such accusations contained the merest shadow of truth, and that even such charges as were proved were true of only a few of the 15,000 men who composed the Order at the time of its dissolution.

There is nothing strange or uncanny in the aspect of Temple Dinsley to-day. It is, rather, just such a homestead as an Englishman might be expected to love. The house is not one of those huge piles in which the owner may lose his way, but is nevertheless spacious enough for any mortal of reasonable ambition. It stands at the head of a long ravine that slopes gently towards the east, in the direction of Minsden Chapel, a ravine which, as I look down into its wealth of waving foliage is filled with that soft, rich glow which so often enhances the beauty of England when day and year are in their afternoon. Roses, clambering here and there upon green trellis-work, sweeten the atmosphere with their perfume, and seats are placed in many coigns of vantage. Northwards there are

lawns before the house and the landscape stretches upwards until, at no great distance, it is crowned with sombre pines.

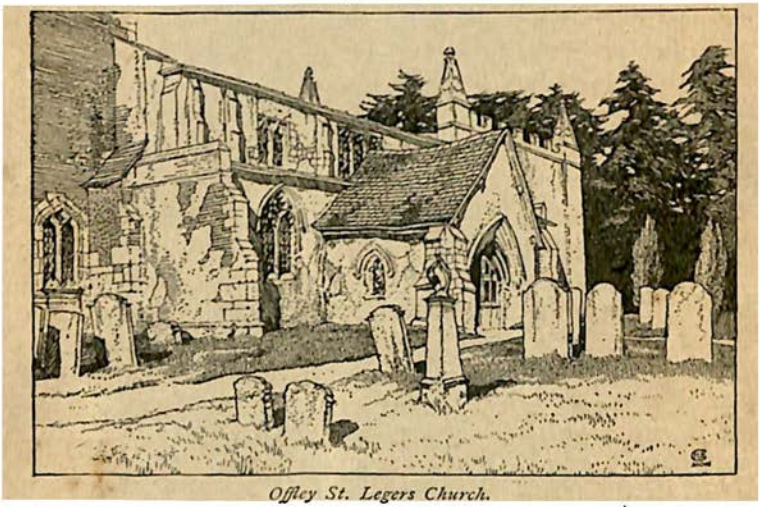
The shadows are beginning to lengthen as I pass through the hamlet of Lay Green along a road which for some distance can boast nothing of much interest or unusual charm. And yet I know that this northern extremity of Hertfordshire is full of historic reminiscences, and although I can only stroll as far as to Offley before taking the high road to Hitchin, I will point out such things as are worthy to be remembered by others who may follow in my footsteps. That Offa II., King of the Mercians, was the Offa to whom Great Offley owes its name seems indisputable. His story is not wholly to his credit; but is strange enough to deserve the attention of such as visit the straggling village. It is in part the story of a great sin and of a great effort to atone for that sin's committal. Offa, according to that useful historian, Henry of Huntingdon, was descended from Wodin, the Teutonic God of War. He was active and ambitious; a law maker and a law breaker. By his defeat of the West Saxons he added what is now Oxfordshire to his Kingdom of Mercia. He overran and conquered Kent; he extended the western confines of Mercia into Wales. He subdued the East Saxons also, and is said to have invited Æthelbert to his palace, to have promised him his daughter in marriage, and then to have secretly ordered him to be beheaded. He restored, on Thorney Island, that edifice which was the predecessor of Edward the Confessor's Abbey Church at West Minster: he attended, with his *witan*, the legatine Council at Cealchythe (Chelsea). He seems, indeed, to have interested himself in matters ecclesiastical with a relish which the church did not always appreciate, and, according to Henry of Huntingdon, promised the Pope a tribute from every house in Mercia. "He drew," says Milton, "a trench of wondrous length between Mercia and the British confines from sea to sea." In the year 795 he placed his Charter of Donation upon the high

altar of the great Hertfordshire abbey which he had founded to atone for his crime; in the following year he died in his palace here at Offley. We are assured by William of Malmesbury that Charlemagne encouraged Offa's desire to found a monastery, and, curiously enough, a *denier* of Charlemagne was found, about the middle of last century, near the great doorway of the abbey. King Alfred, of whom while I write everybody is thinking, acknowledged his indebtedness to Offa and others when preparing his Code of Laws. "I have taken," he wrote, "what seemed best from the times of Ine, my kinsman, of Offa, King of the Mercians, and of Æthelbert, the first of the English kin to receive baptism, and the rest I have passed by."

The archæologist who deems it of prime importance to find a man's grave may spend much time and labour in searching for the grave of Offa. Matthew Paris, who wrote a life of this Mercian monarch, tells us that Offa was buried at Bedford; some tiles, found in the church at Great Offley in 1777, were supposed to prove conclusively that the royal bones were buried in that sanctuary, until Cussans dealt the theory a destructive blow by showing that the word *ossa* had been mistaken for *Offa*, and local claims had to be at least modified. Hemel Hempstead was a third claimant for the honour. In 1836 the sexton of the church found an entire coffin and lid of stone, but on the lid being removed the bones in the coffin promptly crumbled. Some characters on the lid, partly obliterated, are said to have "proved" that the remains were the remains of Offa. It is of course possible that the King was buried at Bedford and removed to Offley or Hemel Hempstead some centuries afterwards when churches were built at those places upon their present sites. That they were brought here to Offley seems likely enough, but it would be more difficult to assign any reason for their removal to Hemel Hempstead.

The church of St. Mary Magdalene at Offley is a Perpendicular structure which Cussans considered "much marred by

the apsidal chancel, which was rebuilt by Sir Thomas Salusbury about the year 1750." There is a monument on the south wall to Sir Thomas and his wife, executed by Nollekens; but as there is no service of any kind this evening I must leave Offley without setting foot in its church. I may mention that this Sir Thomas Salusbury was a Judge of the High Court of Admiralty, but it is more interesting to know that he was an uncle of Hester Lynch Salusbury, who became Mrs. Thrale, and afterwards—much to Dr.



Offley St. Legers Church.

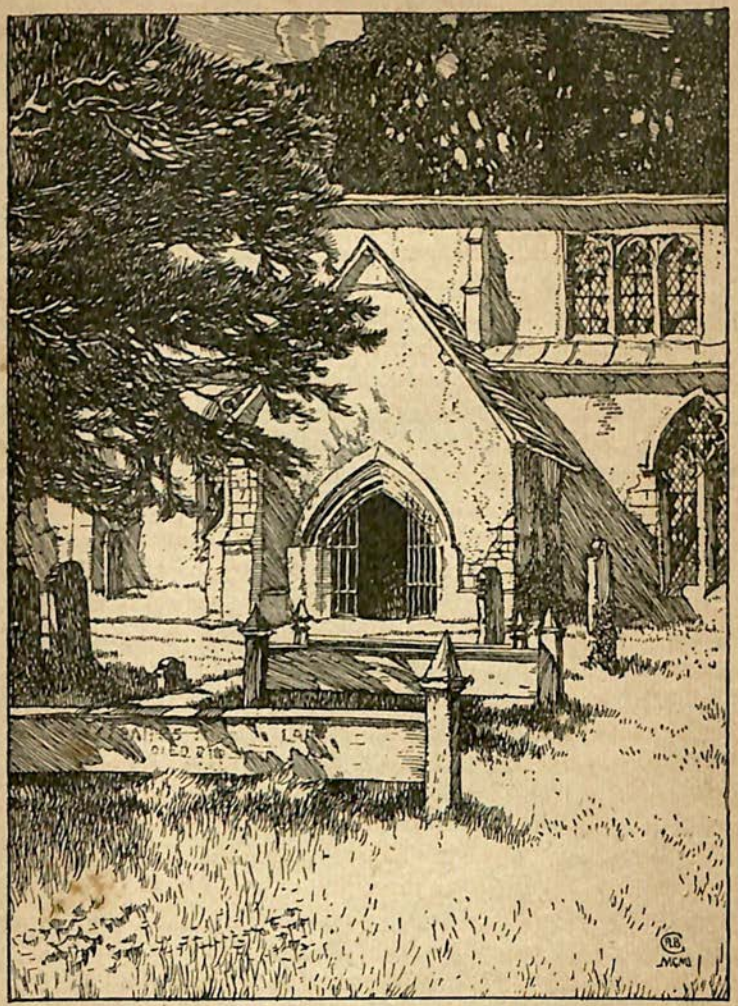
Johnson's disgust—Mrs. Piozzi. She has told us, in her *Autobiography*, that her first husband was born at Offley, and that his family had long lived at St. Albans. As a girl she was often at Offley Place, a fine old Elizabethan mansion, since rebuilt, standing in the park a little distance from the village. The family name is perpetuated in local records by that of the Rev. Lynch Salusbury, who was vicar of Offley from 1787 to 1835, and, if I read the genealogical puzzle correctly, was second cousin to Hester. I wish I could think that Johnson was a visitor at Offley Place, and that he had stayed

up half the night drinking tea, airing his prejudices, and teaching local blockheads how to talk; but I know my Boswell, and am afraid the village never saw his face. Nor, so far as I am aware, did Mrs. Thrale visit here after her marriage. The folks at Offley Place knew her only as a girl, but, as we know that she was precocious, and a good scholar, she was perhaps, even in those days, "one of those clever, kind-hearted, engaging, vain, pert young women, who are perpetually doing or saying what is not exactly right, but who, do or say what they may, are always agreeable."[1]

Now, had I unlimited leisure, I might cross the Icknield Way, two miles north-west from Offley, and visit either Hexton or Pirton. Near the former is a spot called *Bury Stede*, once, as tradition tells us, a residence of Saxon kings; near the latter there are still the remains of pre-Roman earthworks, and in a neighbouring field some lucky mortals once discovered Roman coins—and twenty-eight human skeletons. The church of St. Mary at Pirton was founded in the 11th century by Ralph de Limesie; the tower was rebuilt in 1876, but has not yet entirely put off from its walls the handiwork of the Norman. A tablet in the west wall of that church, perpetuating the memory of one Jane Docwra, who died in 1645, has the following "epitaph by hersele" placed beneath the record of her virtues:—

"I rest in hope til Christ shall come,
I feare not death, nor day of dome,
Though earth cover me
Death can not devoure me,
Christ myne and thine,
Our meeting a happie greeting,
O merrie last day, wellcome, wellcome,
Lord, I will bowe and thou shalt beate,
Deliver me from hell heate,
O Death where is thy sting,
O grave, where is thy victorie,
Thankes to my Lord Christ
They can not hurt me."

[1] *Vide* Macaulay's *Life of Johnson.*



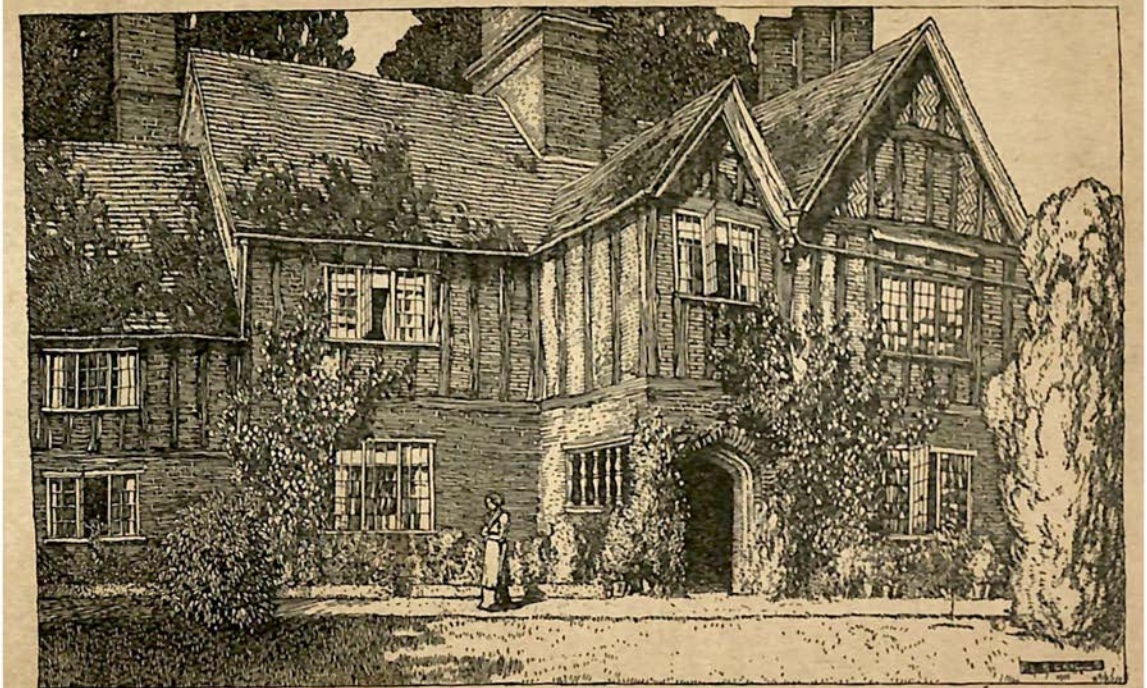
South Porch, Offley St. Legers Church.

The living of Pirton, like so many others in Hertfordshire, is of great antiquity. I have mentioned that the church itself was founded in the 11th century; there has been a continuous

succession of vicars from the days of "Roger"—his surname seems unknown—who was instituted in 1218. For the greater part of the time previous to the dissolution of the monasteries the living was under the patronage of the Prior and Convent of Hertford; during that period Pirton was cared for successively by forty-six vicars. The parish registers have been kept for about three hundred and fifty years.

I have said that the famous Icknield Way, with its memories of Boadicea and the Iceni, runs between Offley and Pirton. From Dunstable it leads to Ickleford, Baldock, Ashwell Station and Royston. Much of that route lies across high and breezy districts. Perhaps the spot in the neighbourhood of the Icknield Way most venerated by antiquaries is Hexton—the "Hegæstanestone" of *Domesday Book*—the town of the high stone. For south of Hexton there is a hill called Ravensburgh Castle, which antiquaries tell us is the site of a pre-Roman camp, fortified afresh by the Romans themselves, and subsequently captured and occupied by the Danes. That the bloody bearers of the Raven Banner were no strangers to the vicinity is proved by a chartulary, *i.e.*, a monastic register, once in St. Alban's Abbey, in which it is recorded that Sexi the Dane bestowed the manor of Hexton upon the Benedictine monastery. He presumably stole the property at the sword's point and eventually deemed it expedient, for his soul's welfare, to bestow it upon a church which, in those times at least, seldom hesitated to make friends of the Mammon of unrighteousness. An antiquarian, seeking the site of Ravensburgh Castle for the first time, would hardly be edified by his discoveries. He would find, I believe, a mound of no great size with a ditch around it, and little else.

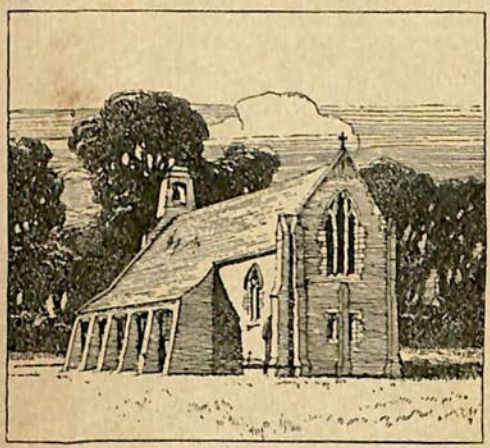
The church at Hexton is dedicated to St. Faith, and the well of the saint, long since choked up, is marked by a wooden cross erected, some thirty years ago, near the road that leads to Barton-in-the-clay. The narrow neck of land upon which the church stands is surrounded on three sides by the county of



Hammond's Farm, Pirton.

Bedfordshire, and to folk who have never stepped out of Hertfordshire (I have known several such) the well of St. Faith is indeed the "Well at the World's End." The waters of that well were of miraculous efficacy, and an image of its saint was long preserved in the chapel of St. Faith Virgin, of which no stone remains. In the chancel of the church there are some verses which are copied by many for their quaintness and I copy them here. They refer to one John Elliott, clerk and smith of the parish, who died in 1795 :—

"My Sledge and Hammer lie reclined,
My bellows too have lost their wind ;
My fire's extinct, my forge decayed,
And in the dust my vice is laid ;
My coal is spent, my iron's gone,
My nails are drove, my work is done ;
My rusted corpse is here at rest,
My soul . . ak like . . to be blest."



St. Martin's Church, Preston.

Wymondley Magna—Morning.

CHAPTER X

LITTLE WYMONDLEY, GREAT WYMONDLEY, HITCHIN

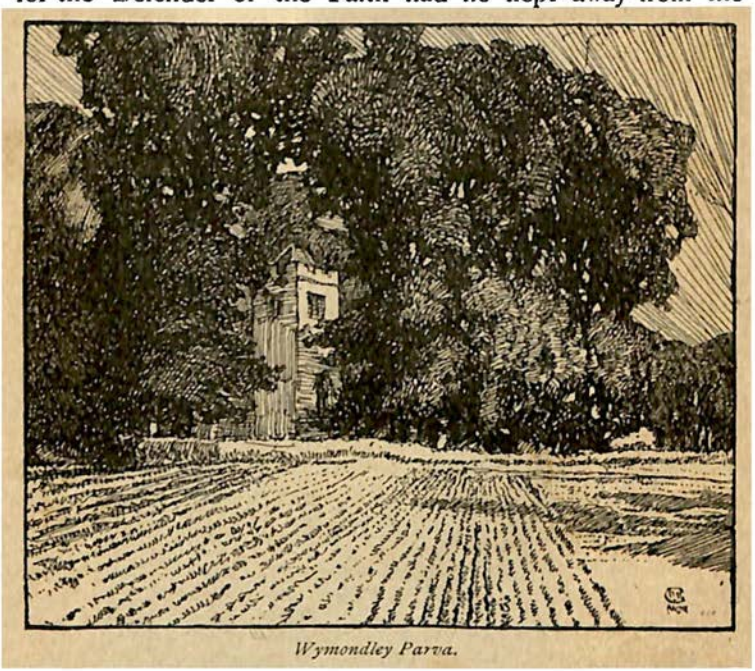
I OPEN my note-book once again on a clear morning in early autumn, in the village of Little Wymondley. I wandered here from Stevenage just now, pausing at one spot only to catch a glimpse of Graveley among the trees, a study of cottage roofs in light and shade. And the picture of that village, nestling so snugly among those fine old trees is all the more charming because autumn has already put some tints of brown among the green. Autumn, as William Allingham says in a fine sonnet, is more tender in its moods than any of the joys of indulgent summer. I cannot sympathise with Millevoye, who saw little in the fall of the leaf save a presage of death. In these Hertfordshire rambles of mine I shall love the autumn woodlands and pastures, as I have loved them hitherto, for their own sweet sake. And presently those stately homes

which I shall see will be invested with a charm denied to summer, for the trees among which they lie embosomed will be partially denuded of leaves, thereby displaying them more fully under the glamour of distance. And byways, too, will wear a heightened charm. Many a time, in this district of Hertfordshire, I have stood silently in some pathway through the woods, watching the pheasants stroll here and there in the bracken, until suddenly they have gone off with a whirr and a rattle, and I have wandered on into Codicot, or Whitwell, or Kimpton, while the setting sun has "touched the stubble fields with rosy hue," prolonging my ramble homewards until the mists of evening have commenced to rise in the Maran valley, and it has been almost too dark for me to discern those moorhens upon the eyot, whose nest I rifled earlier in the year.

I have strayed down the fragrant bypaths of reminiscence and must mend my ways. So I repeat that I am at Little Wymondley, at the stile near the church of St. Mary the Virgin. The church stands upon gently rising ground, not fifty yards from the railroad, half-way between the towns of Stevenage and Hitchin. Its consecrated precincts cover, I suppose, less than an acre of ground—God's acre—and are surrounded by a ring of tall elms through which to-day the breeze wanders with a soughing and whispering of the leaves. And through those elms the sun shines on the red-tiled roof of nave and chancel, and on the old stone tower, casting strong shadows of waving bough and twig upon the whole building. A redbreast is singing softly upon a lower branch, and sparrows are hopping to and fro before the south porch, sometimes venturing into the porch itself. There are but two score headstones in the churchyard, but many more green hillocks; and sad ones some of them—how tiny!

Most tourists will find but little to detain them in *Wymondley Parva*, as this village once was called; but they may notice some quaint old cottages, with thatched and twisted roofs, and

may chat with quaint old folk who live in those cottages. There was once a priory here, of Black Canons, founded by Richard de Argenthem in the reign of Henry III. To this priory, as the story runs, came Henry VIII. when visiting Cardinal Wolsey who lived a while at Delamere House, in the adjoining village of *Wymondley Magna*. It had been better for the Defender of the Faith had he kept away from the

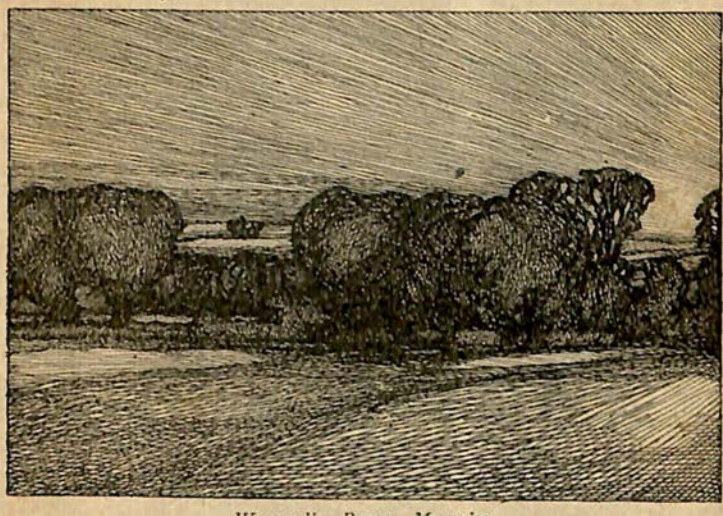


Wymondley Parva.

neighbourhood, for in one instance, at least, his visit brought him no luck. Stowe tells us that the King went to Hitchin, and from Hitchin to Temple Dinsley. There he went a-hawking and pole-jumping, and presently fell head foremost into a muddy ditch, and was drawn out, a piteous sight, by a "footman" named Edmond Mody.

Taking my way to look for Wolsey's abode—it is not a mile

distant—I pass down the village street from east to west, the *Plume of Feathers* on my right and *The Bucks Head* upon my left, until I come to the lane that leads to St. Ippolyts, on the Hitchin road, where William Lax, "Lownde Professor of Astronomy and Geometry in the University of Cambridge," built his observatory in the days of his vicarship. Here, turning to the right, I cross the railway to find myself before the gates of Delamere House. The mansion was restored in Elizabeth's day, and the Elizabethan character of its architec-



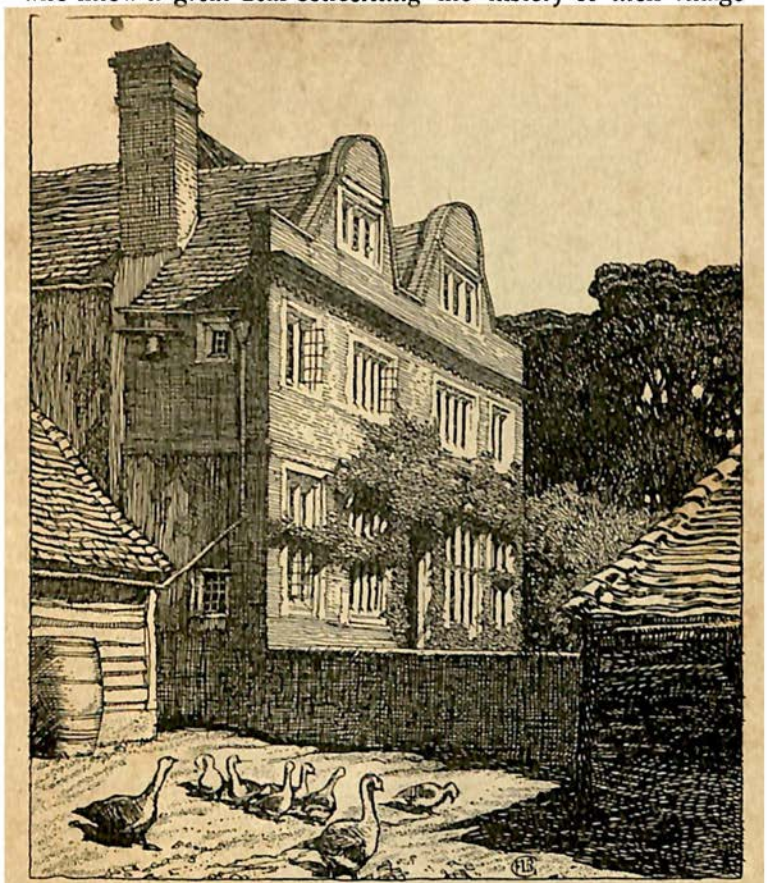
Wymondley Parva—Moonrise.

ture is apparent even to the novice. An old, red brick house, with many windows filled with small leaded panes, around which the ivy clings closely, mounting even to the base of the high chimneys. To the visitor who walks around its trim gravel walks, or pauses to admire the wealth of colour displayed in the many beds of flowers in the gardens, there is nothing in the aspect of Delamere House that speaks of antiquity. Yet old it is, though you may read many lives of Wolsey without finding his residence here so much as mentioned; perhaps,

because it displayed none of his characteristic magnificence. It is certain that if the King came over from the priory to visit the Cardinal here his reception and entertainment must have been meagre indeed compared with what he was accustomed to enjoy at Wolsey's receptions elsewhere. "And when it pleased the King's majesty, for his recreation, to repaire unto the cardinalls house, as he did diverse times in the yeare, there wanted no preparation, or goodly furniture, with viandes of the choicest sorte that could be gotten for money or friendshippe. . . Banquettes were set forthe, maskes, and moumeries, in so gorgeous a sorte, and costly manner, that it was a heaven to behold. There wanted no dames, nor damoselles, meete or apt to daunce with the maskers, or to garnish the place for that time, with other goodly disportes." So wrote Sir William Cavendish, Gentleman Usher to Wolsey, and the passage shows clearly which way the wind blew when bluff King Hal chose to be amused at the cost of his Chancellor, that "honest poore man's sonne of Ipswiche in the county of Suffolk."

It is three and a half centuries since king and cardinal fraternised at Great Wymondley, and yet if either of them were to revisit the precincts of Delamere House he might have speech with folk whose ancestors came to live in the village during the reign of Anne Boleyn's proud daughter. For the family living at *The Green Man* has been represented in the same house for over three hundred years. They are stalwart descendants of a venerable line, and "mine host" of *The Green Man*, for three consecutive generations, has lived to be more than ninety years of age. Their fine old inn stands near the sign-post at the meeting of the roads from Hitchin, Willian, Graveley, and St. Ippolyts, and should certainly not be overlooked by any wanderer in Hertfordshire. You may toast your sides on a winter's evening in such a chimney corner as I have not sat in since leaving Tewin, and may see beams of oak which might support the roof until the crack of doom.

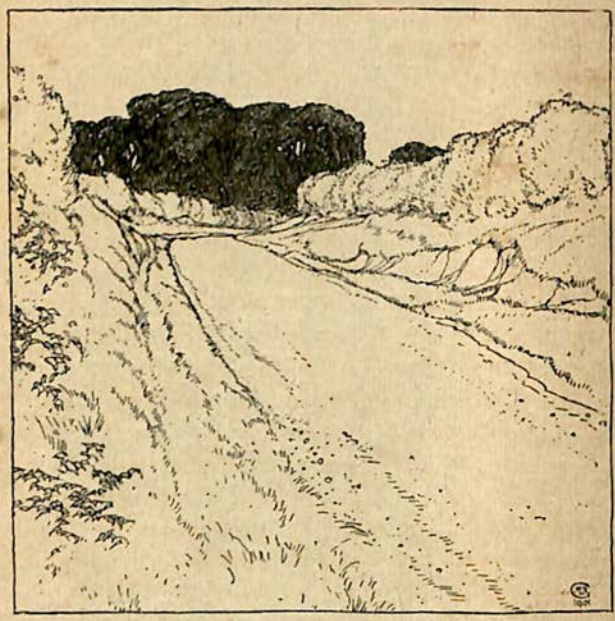
And, if you share my pleasures and love the things that I love, you will be glad to find that the inn is frequented by several men who know a great deal concerning the history of their village



Delamere House.

and its neighbourhood. When first I set out upon my rambles I anticipated that I should glean many stories of interest in wayside inns, and this morning I am certainly finding my

expectations realised. I have been listening to the confabulations of more than a dozen worthies, who seem, between them, to know their district well, and are by no means displeased to find that "a chiel's among them takin' notes." I pass by the tradition that Edward VI. once slept at the priory, and the many surmises as to the origin of the fortifications in "Captain's Orchard" near the church of St. Mary, which church,



Approach to Great Wymondley.

by the bye, is, with a single exception, the only one in Hertfordshire that has an apse. But some other matters discussed at *The Green Man* are of more interest.

About a mile from Great Wymondley is a spot called Purwell Mill, where the Ippolyts brook unites with the little river Pur. Here, in 1884, some persons discovered the remains of a Roman villa. There was no mistaking the nature of the discovery, for

the tesselated pavement was in a state of fine preservation and the hearth was almost perfect. A portion of a wall was standing too, and some Roman coins were picked out of the loosened earth as the work of excavation proceeded. It was the discovery of a genuine relic of a bygone civilisation, a civilisation deemed superior, by many archæologists, to our own, and at least as wonderful. And if any reader allows himself to think how immeasurably superior our present condition is when compared with that of any other race, past or present, I commend to him the thoughtful study of Max Müller's essay on *The Savage*. This by the way. At Great Wymondley I find that the Roman relics which evoke the greatest interest are the coins, and I am not surprised. Roman urns and arms have also been unearthed in the neighbourhood, but it is of the coins that the local folk most freely speak, for these have been found frequently, one here, one there, and the finder of a coin can often keep it in his possession, whereas the finder of an urn, if a workman of humble standing, is sure to part with it either by choice or from necessity. I know of few circumstances more impressive than the discovery of some implement fashioned by human hands a thousand, perhaps two thousand, years ago. Very possibly it has lain buried in the centre of your quiet village for nearly the whole of that period. Generation after generation of children have gambolled above it, grown up, and gone the way of all flesh. And then one day you think you will pull down your barn and build a greater, and you probe the bosom of mother earth deeper than it has been probed at that spot for so many centuries—and here it is! If a coin it is so small, so insignificant as you turn it over and over in your palm; but to such as know the trend of the world's history, how eloquently it speaks! The hand that shaped it was turned to dust and ashes soon afterwards, so brief is the life of the artificer, so durable the qualities of much that his hand fashions. Most of the coins found in Hertfordshire are distributed among the collections of private numismatists. I should like to see them brought

together into a museum worthy to contain them, for they are many, and some are in excellent preservation.

But there are traces in the neighbourhood of Great Wymondley of a world many times as ancient as that which the Roman organised in Britain. Those traces are fainter far than the traces of the Roman; as well they may be, for they take us back to the era of palæolithic man, when, as geologists assure us, a considerable lake lay in the valley to the south-east from Hitchin, upon the confines of which man lived in curious homes, as man was wont to do in the old Stone Age. And when his era was a thing of the past, and even the lake—upon which for aught we *know* to the contrary, he built his home—had vanished, it was found that he had done what so many races and tribes were destined to do afterwards—he had left his tools behind him. Those tools, in the shape of worked flints such as knives and scrapers, so precious in the eyes of archæologists, have been picked out from the bed of the lake, and from the later deposits superimposed upon it in the course of ages. Moreover, the teeth of the elephant and bear, the antlers of a large stag, and some bones of the rhinoceros have been found in the valley, and are treasured by their owners as further evidence, if such were needed, that the world in which they dwell is a world of vicissitudes, and that the character of its inhabitants, human and bestial, is ever changing.

When the lapse of time had brought our ancestors to the period of the Norman conquest, the Lord of the Manor of Great Wymondley was singled out for such an honour as lords still love, for he became cupbearer at the coronation of the king. How often his successors filled this office I cannot say, nor is it likely that anybody can tell me; but the last of those manorial worthies so distinguished was, I believe, cup-bearer to that monarch who was "beyond the reach of any education" —King George the Fourth.

At a spot in private grounds, called Well Head, three miles

westward from Great Wymondley, there rises a tiny stream which flows presently past Charlton, where Henry Bessemer was born, and after passing through Hitchin and Ickleford and uniting with other waters flows into the Ouse. That stream for a thousand years has borne the name of Hiz. By some writers it is believed to have given its name to the town of Hitchin, a fine cluster of habitations which has for centuries spread slowly across the valley of the Hiz; by others the town is said to have given its name to the stream. We are also told that a dense wood grew once in the valley, that several homesteads on its outskirts spread gradually to one, and that the town thus formed was first called Hitchin at the end of the fourteenth century.

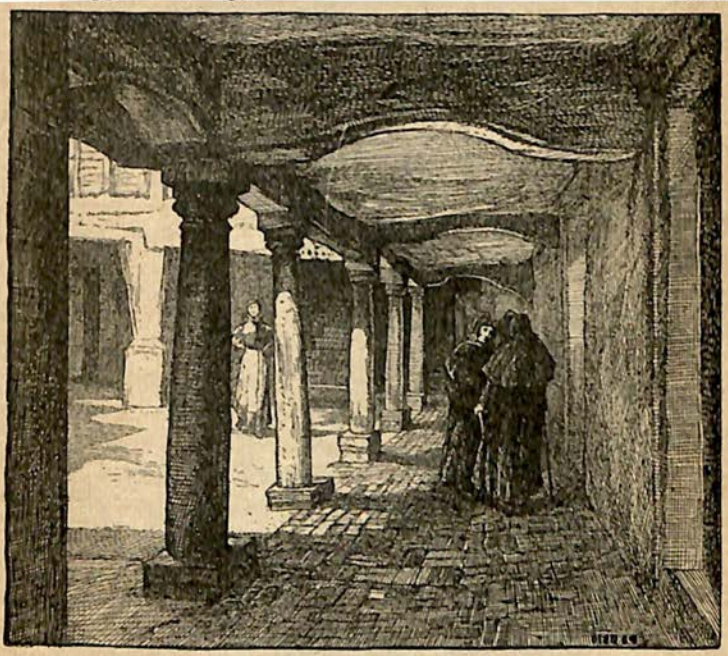
The antiquity of Hitchin is acknowledged by all; but its origin is a matter of dispute. That a town of considerable size stood here in the days of the Roman occupation, and that its inhabitants were at one time largely Roman, is proved by a multitude of individually unimportant facts. But it is hard to say whether Hitchin was built by those warriors or whether they took possession of a town already existing. Fragments of Roman pottery and many coins have been found at numerous spots; these however, in themselves, prove nothing to the point. But if they prove *nothing* they suggest much. Among the coins thus found is one of silver, bearing the likeness of Faustina Augusta, wife of Marcus Aurelius Antoninus and mother of the profligate Commodus. To see that coin is to think, not of Hitchin, but of Rome, of the twin son born to Faustina at Lanuvium, of the story of the self-styled 'Hercules,' and of those gladiatorial combats in the arena described in the incomparable fourth chapter of Gibbon.

The mists of tradition lift after a while, and we discern a fact more clearly here and there. It was at *Hicce* that Offa lived and kept royal state whilst awaiting the preparation of his home four miles to the south-west; and here, for two years, lived a relation of the Mercian King, named Eadric, appointed second Abbot of St. Alban's on the death of Willegod, who

had been chosen first abbot by Offa himself. It was Eyfrith, a son of Offa, who laid the first stone of a religious house in Hitchin, dedicated to St. Andrew. We know that Edward the Confessor gave the town to Earl Harold, that in Domesday Book it figures as part and parcel of the King's demesnes, and that shortly afterwards it became the property of the Baliols. Edward II. bestowed the manor on Robert de Kendale—I wonder he did not give it to Piers Gaveston—and subsequently it changed hands so often that I will only note that Henry VIII. made a present of it first to Catherine of Aragon, then to Anne Boleyn, then to Jane Seymour. The Parliament of the Commonwealth claimed the manor after putting to death its royal owner, but it reverted to kingly keeping at the Restoration. In a MS. history of Hitchin written in 1815, by William Dunnage, postmaster, the author regrets, I am told, that some books used in his compilation were destroyed by damp, and expresses the opinion that no small portion of the town's records are irrevocably lost. And yet a deal is known concerning the story of Hitchin during the last few centuries, and it is but a small part of that story that I can stay to repeat.

It stands recorded that in the year 1545 one John Cokks of Broxbourne made overtures for the purchase of "certain tenements cottages and houses in Ichyn parcell of the lands belonging to the late Priory of Bygyng in the town of Hychen." His application was successful, and the manor remained in the possession of his family until 1606. This old mansion-house, called the Biggin, is perhaps the strangest homestead I have seen in my rambles. The Biggin, as almshouses, now affords shelter to several old women, who make me welcome and are pleased at the interest with which I regard their historic structure. I would not visit these almshouses on a dark night, for my head would certainly come in contact with one of the many massive posts which support some of the upper rooms. I could convert this Biggin into a cosy college for a few "gentlemen

commoners," for here is the quadrangle, there is the pump for sousing the townsmen, and on these fine old masses of oaken pile we could carve much nonsense in prose or verse. But the likeness of the Biggin must be seen ere the quaintness of the original can be appreciated; so I leave readers to the study of Mr. Griggs's drawing, which will tell them more than the longest

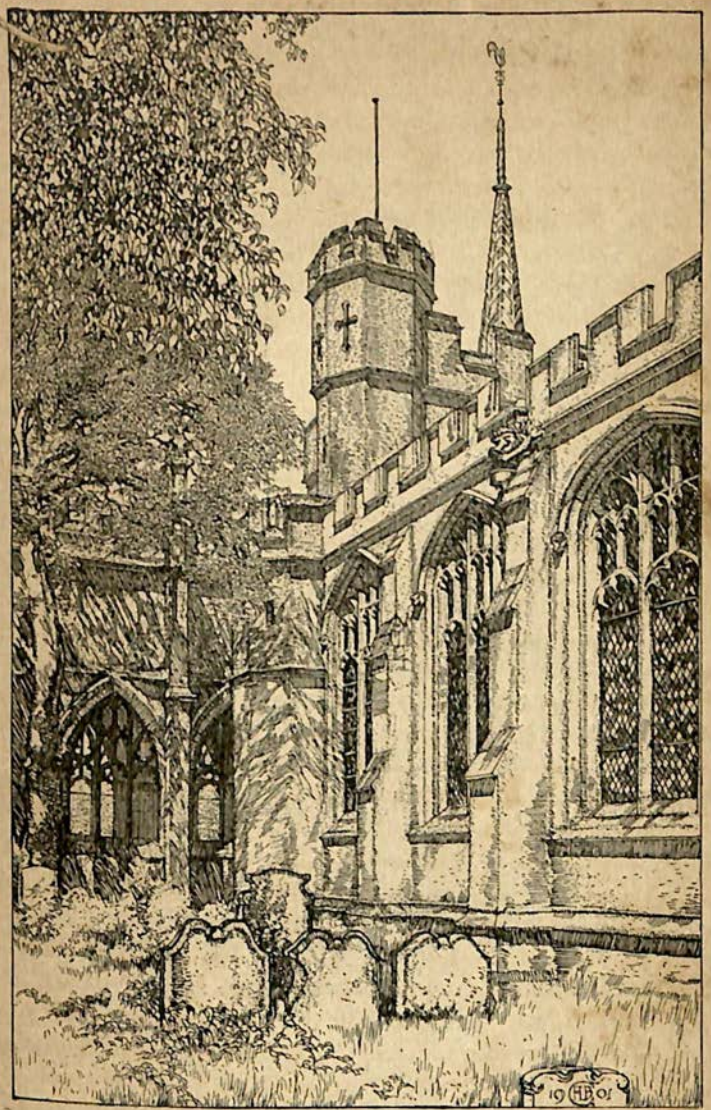


The Biggin Almshouse, Hitchin.

paragraph. On this spot once lived a community of Gilbertine nuns. Their house was one of about five and twenty houses of the same Order that went the way of all nunneries in the days of Henry VIII. The Order was founded by Gilbert, a son of that old Norman noble Jocelyn de Sempringham. More than 750 years ago he built a home for destitute girls at Sempringham in Lincolnshire and in the reign of Edward III. this

retreat by the little river Hiz—the garden of the nunnery bordering the river—was founded too. Doubtless the good ladies lived here in the most absolute seclusion, for the rule of Gilbert, framed on that of Benedict, was exceptionally severe touching the isolation of the nuns from the outer world; yet they were not, I suppose, unhappy, for we read that fifteen hundred women entered Gilbertine nunneries during the reign of Stephen alone. They were safer here than elsewhere, for those were days of trouble and the hand of every man was against his neighbour. There was another Gilbertine nunnery about eight miles from here—at "Chicklands," between Hitchin and Bedford.

Some very different reflections are mine as I remember the story of Eugene Aram. One can hardly ignore that notorious character when writing upon Hertfordshire, for Bulwer Lytton lived, as I have reminded readers, at Knebworth; and Godwin, whom I wrote of when at Ware, suggested much to Lytton touching both subject and plot of the novel of which Aram is the hero. Just now, as I crossed over from Bancroft to the church, I passed close to where the "usher" once lived in Golden Square, and where he often, I doubt not, "took six hasty strides." There was a school here known as Church House, and in this school, as in schools elsewhere, Eugene Aram was a tutor. Nor does his connection with the county end here; for when, shortly before paying the penalty of his crimes, he penned a brief narrative of his life, he mentioned that he was once at Weld, or Wild, near Shenley, where lived his kinsman Thomas Aram. Moreover, Thomas Aram married Genevieva, a daughter of Sir Harry Coningsby of North Mimms. I doubt whether the memory of Eugene Aram has ever burdened many folks in Hitchin. It is more than 150 years since he murdered Daniel Clark in St. Robert's Cave near the town of Knaresborough, and in Hitchin, as elsewhere, most people who have read anything about him have done so in the pages of Lytton. Mr. Norway remembered Eugene Aram



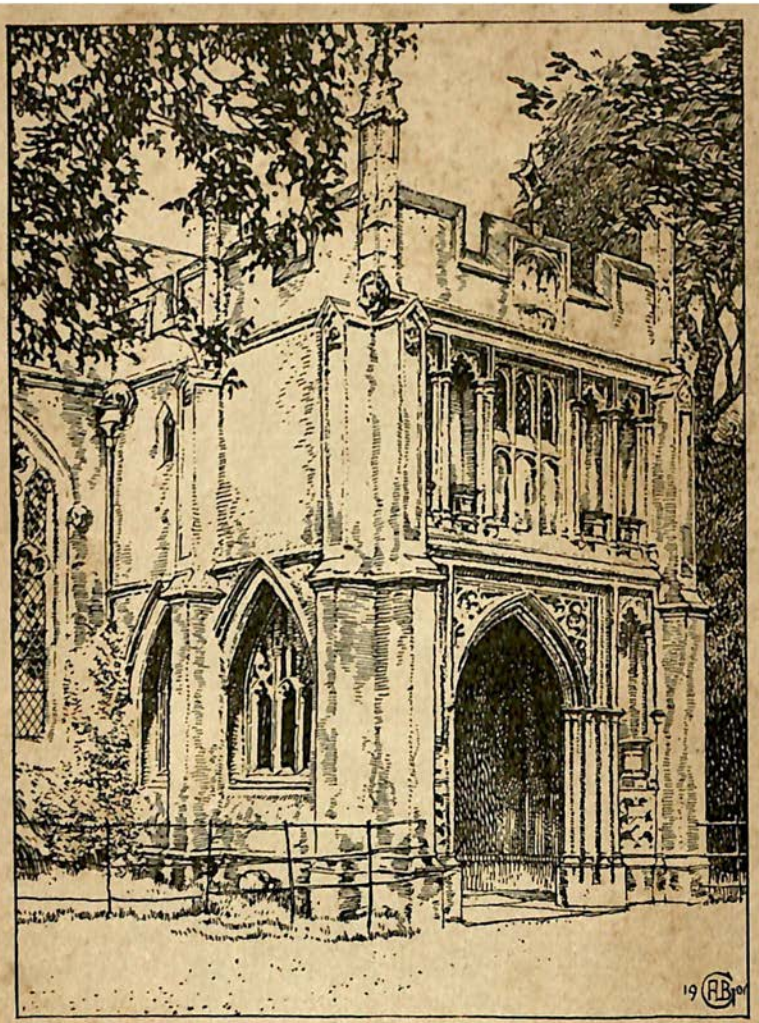
Hitchin Church from South-east.

when visiting Knaresborough and styled him, very justly, an "atrocious scoundrel." It was during the days of his first school-mastership that the crime was committed, and here in Hitchin he must have borne his awful secret wherever he went.

I turn to more pleasant themes. I have been wondering how many artists might have found subjects for pictures in the broad Bancroft, the spacious market square, the narrow back-streets and alleys, and the quiet nooks and corners of old Hitchin. I know that Hitchin is not the most historic of towns, nor has it either the flavour of romance that gathers around the old abbey of St. Albans or archives whose treasures will compare with those of that small but venerable city. But it has many charms, and among them are the old houses that have survived all local 'improvements.' Quaint sign-boards swing slowly to and fro in the breeze before ale houses which might have fed the Roundheads on that day when they did their best to spoil the largest parish church in the county of Hertfordshire. Huge brick chimney-stacks, leaning at perilous angles, threaten to topple over upon the steeply sloping roofs of inns and cottages alike. Indeed, there is an almost mediæval charm about some of these small winding streets. A careful survey of the town and its immediate neighbourhood would convince you that artists of all schools could find pictures here, even without the prescience of Michelangelo, who saw an angel in a block of marble. "My eyes make pictures when they're shut," wrote Coleridge; an ordinary man might find them here with his eyes open. I would like a portrait of one of the old ladies of the Biggin by Rembrandt; a Hitchin from Windmill Hill, by Turner; a morning scene in the Market Place, by Millet; or a landscape at Purwell Mill by Claude Lorraine. But lacking such treasures, it is best to look lovingly at such scenes as we would fain remember, and be thankful that, after all, the entire world is one huge gallery hung round with pictures by the Master Painter.

Talking of pictures, there is a genuine Rubens in the parish church—at least, I have never heard its genuineness disputed. It is a painting of the Adoration of the Magi, and hangs over the north door, but was once above the altar. It was presented, in 1774, by John Radcliffe, Esq. If it is not indeed the work of Rubens, it must be that of some imitator whose hand had almost the cunning of the Flemish master; for it is unquestionably Rubenesque; but this supposition is hardly more than a possibility. No man was ever more indisputably supreme in his own domain and among his own school, and imitators have usually produced pictures a very long way *after* Rubens. As M. Henri Hymans has said, neither in name nor in fact did the Flemish school ever find a second Rubens! The mosaics which are now behind the altar are, I suppose, not without merit, but an acre of such workmanship would not purchase another canvas by the hand that drew the pictures of Mary de Medici in the Louvre. The central mosaic represents the Lord's Supper; on the right is Christ talking with the woman of Samaria, and the Shepherd with a lamb in his bosom: on the left is Moses striking the rock, and the gathering of the Manna: beautiful subjects and not unhappily treated. Nor are the three western windows devoid of beauty. They perpetuate the memory of John, Frederick and William Hawkins, three brothers who lived together in the town of Hitchin for nearly forty years.

Perpendicular and late Decorated architecture is prominent in this church of St. Mary, which was restored by Sir Gilbert Scott and Sir Arthur Blomfield. The tower is large, but unusually low for its size, and is strongly buttressed. Tower, nave, chancel and aisles are alike battlemented, which, to my thinking, enhances the beauty of the exterior when viewed from between the limes on the southern side; and what a fine old structure is, or rather was, this southern porch! Of the groined roof sufficient is preserved to show what it once was; the Ironsides, who were often iron-hearted too, could perhaps



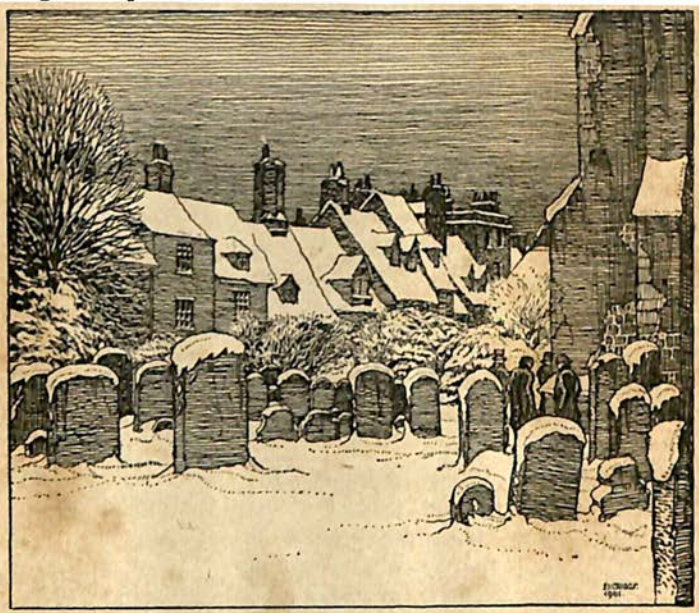
South Porch, Hitchin Church.

have explained how the beauty of this porch was so pitiably marred by the hands of iconoclasts who chopped the faces from the Apostles on that grand old font, carved centuries ago from a block of Ketton stone. The porch is surmounted by four pinnacles, and the front has pedestals for six small statues, but the niches are empty. Those who lament this lost handiwork may solace themselves by entering the church and inspecting the beautiful screens of oaken tracery enclosing the chancel-chapels, which are among the finest in the country.

Coming out of the church and loitering in Tilehouse Street, my thoughts revert to one who was a Puritan in thought and indeed, but whom we can all think of without regret. Indeed, I was reminded of the great dreamer whilst lingering in the churchyard, for I noticed headstones to the memory of some who bore the names of Newton, Chapman, Fox, Godwin, Moore, Bentley and—Bunyan. And here, on the left hand side as I pass up Tilehouse Street, is the Baptist Chapel, built in 1844, to take the place of the Old Meeting House of 1692, founded largely through the efforts of John Bunyan. The present Salem Chapel is not beautiful, nor, probably, was its predecessor; for the Baptists share one at least of Emerson's Articles of Faith, believing that God builds His sanctuary in the human heart on the ruins of temples and churches. A chair in the present vestry was given by Bunyan. One John Wilson, who had "sat under" Bunyan in the old chapel at Bedford, was the first pastor to feed the flock at Hitchin, and endured considerable persecution in those days when the Baptists, like the Christians of old, were "everywhere spoken against." But despite all opposition the worthy pastor laboured on, until he became so feeble that for some years he was carried to his chapel in a chair. At one time he lay in Hertford gaol for conscience' sake. He died in 1717 at Bull Corner, a few minutes' walk from Salem Chapel, and, as was very meet and right, his congregation buried him beneath the very shadow of his own pulpit. He had fought a good fight

and had kept the faith, and is remembered by students of the literature of Nonconformity for his preface to the earliest folio edition of the works of Bunyan. It is not given to every man to build a portico to so illustrious a Temple.

Lovers of Elizabethan literature have also their Mecca here, for at the top of Tilehouse Street is Mount Pleasant, where George Chapman is believed to have been born. I write



St. Mary's Churchyard, Hitchin.

"believed" for the subject is debatable ground. Mr. Thomas Arnold, in the *Dictionary of National Biography*, says Chapman was born, "probably in Kent," in 1557. Mr. Swinburne, in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, makes no mention of the poet's birthplace, but says he was born in 1559 and died in 1634. Mr. Stopford Brooke again names 1557 as the year of his birth, and gives 1634 as the date of his death. Older authorities are not to my hand. The parochial registers in Hitchin are not quite

ancient enough to help us; but it is known that Chapman had relatives in the town, and that he lived and wrote here for at least a considerable time. So year and place are alike uncertain, but I am not anxious in the matter. I know that in *The Teares of Peace* the poet tells how the shade of Homer had filled his bosom with a "floode of soule" whilst he was "on the Hill next Hitchin's left hand"; and that William Browne, in his *Britannia's Pastorals*, calls him "The learned Shepherd of fair Hitchin Hill." He was Hitchin's poet; that is enough for me. And a shrewd, learned, wordy old bard he was, who did a deal of work besides translating Homer. Did he not pen the tragedies of *Bussy d'Ambois* and of *Cæsar and Pompey*, which were loved by that lover of choice and rare literature, Charles Lamb, who himself turned Chapman's poetical translation of the *Odyssey* into prose for children? It is as the translator of Homer that Chapman is spoken of in Hitchin, and it was here that he translated the last twelve books of the Odyssey in little more than as many weeks. I wonder if it was the memory of such a winter as I described when at Whitwell that shaped and coloured his free translation of the famous winter scene from the hexameters of the father of all poets?

". . . when Jove his cold sharp javelins throws
Amongst us mortals, and is moved to white the earth with snows,
The winds asleep, he freely pours till highest prominents,
Hill-tops, low meadows, and the fields that crown with most contents
The toils of men, seaports and shores, are hid, and every place,
But floods, that fair snow's tender flakes, as their own brood, embrace."

It may interest some lover of Hertfordshire, some one of her sons who jealously cares for her literary reminiscences, to know that Chapman inscribed his translation of the *Works and Days of Hesiod* to Francis Bacon. "These little things are great to little men," and some among us are not ashamed to know that at times, when we are striving to conjure up such visions of the past as shall bring our old favourites before us as something more than shadows, and when,

presently, we light upon some reference to the mighty names we love, we find ourselves, as Hesiod himself has put it, "with the water very near the eyes"!

I have retraced my steps from Tilehouse Street and into the Market Place whilst it is still very early in the morning, and

Church Gates, Hitchin.

from the belfry of St. Mary's Church the chimes are repeating "The minstrel boy to the war is gone." From the Corn Exchange to the *Rose and Crown* the place is almost deserted, and there is little enough in its aspect to suggest how extensive was Hitchin's trade in corn and malt in the days of its greatest prosperity. Maurice Johnson, steward of the manor

in 1779, wrote of its famous corn markets, and mentioned that from two to three hundred waggon-loads of wheat and barley were sometimes in the market at one time. The malting industry was at its height as far back as the days of Elizabeth, nor need I overlook the oft-repeated anecdote which tells how the Queen assured a Spanish nobleman that she set more store by "Hitchin grapes" than by the spoils of Spanish vineyards. Other industries were long connected with the trade in wool. A fulling-mill was in the neighbourhood so long ago as the year 1268; and at Charlton and elsewhere many leaden seals, used for securing bales of wool or other wares, have been discovered. One such bears the figure of a goat, with S.M. in large letters over its back; its edges are ragged, and it resembles nothing so much as those coins which are stamped into metal at Portsmouth Dockyard at the request of visitors. Vellum and parchment making, rope-weaving and tanning, and, of course, straw plaiting, are trades which have been largely carried on in this town, and some of them are still pursued. Buckles for shoes and knees were made in Bucklersbury; the tanners had their yards on the banks of the river Hiz.

The men and maids of Hitchin seem to have always feared that fate which awaits those foolish folks who work, but play not. They certainly did their best to avoid the ills of dulness. The spot called Butt's Close owes its name to the archery once practised there; and Bull Corner was the scene of many a bout of bull-baiting. In a curious map of Hitchin in Chauncy's history a bowling green is marked on the site of the present Corn Exchange. It is not so many years ago since the May-pole was erected in what was once Town Yard, at the farther end of Sun Street, and a procession marched thither arrayed in suitable finery, bearing with them the effigy of the patron of wool-combers, Bishop Blasius. I am afraid it was once the fashion, among influential townsmen, to bait the Quakers,—a sport no wilder than that practised about fifteen

years ago on a memorable Sunday in St. Albans, when well-dressed rowdies applauded those who knocked down members of the Salvation Army, fouled their clothes with dirty water and handled their women roughly. The case of the Quakers was indeed hard, for no law ever protected them; they were regarded as victims who might be insulted with impunity. Even Bunyan, a fellow in adversity, "wrote sharply against the Quakers." In 1661 Thomas Kidner, a priest, prosecuted George Huckle of Hitchin on a pretended claim for moneys owing in respect of tithes in ducks and geese, &c. Now the man Huckle had in reality neither birds nor land to feed them on; but, as Besse says in his folio on the *Sufferings of the Society of Friends*, the priest knew that his victim could make no reply to the charges against him except upon oath, which, as a Quaker, he was unable to do. I am sorry to say the priest was certainly one who should have known better than to bear malice even against a Quaker, for the Rev. Thomas Kidner, M.A. of Magdalen College, Oxford, was some time vicar of Hitchin.

A volume of impressions and reminiscences such as this leads me into innumerable digressions, so long as I care to follow whither my pryings lead me, and I am loath to dismiss Thomas Kidner from my memory without mentioning the sale of his famous library. It was the second auction sale of books held in England, and bibliomaniacs may couple the incident with the purchase, by Richard de Bury for fifty pounds weight of silver, of volumes from the Abbot of St. Alban's for what D'Israeli wrote of as "perhaps the first private library in our country." Kidner's books were sold in London in February 1677. A copy of the catalogue, showing the price paid for each book, is in the British Museum, and as its title-page must be of interest to every Latinist in Hitchin, I transcribe it from a note in the work of the indefatigable Cussans:—*Catalogus variorum et Insignium Librorum Selectissimæ Bibliothecæ Reverendi Viri D. Thomæ Kidner, A.M. Et olim Rectoris*

Over Wratten, Hitchin.

Ecclesiæ de Hitchin in Comitatu Hertfordiense. Quorum Auctio habebitur Londini ad Insigne Capitis Regii in vico vulgariter dicto Little-Britain, Februarii 6to, Per Guilielmum Cooper, Bibliopolani. Catalogi gratis Distribuentur ad Insigne Pelecani in vico vulgariter dicto Little Britain $167\frac{6}{7}$.

Well, I must leave Hitchin and make my way towards Willian and Baldock. I go down Bancroft and, turning into the Hermitage Road, pass some box trees of so large a size that they set me speculating as to their possible age. They have long reached their maximum size, so far as I can judge from appearances, for our British box rarely exceeds a height of about sixteen feet; and as this tree grows so slowly as to add less than two inches to its diameter in twenty years, these specimens must certainly have been growing during the reign of many monarchs. I leave them to survive as many more as they may, and presently come to the top of Dead Street, so called because of the mortality in its houses when the plague wrought havoc in the homes of Hitchin. Leaving such unsavoury memories, I reach the top of Windmill Hill. The town of Hitchin lies below me in the valley, sheltered by swelling hills on every side—High Down and Beacon Hill and Tingley Wood. I can see the thin wreaths of smoke rising from hundreds of cottage chimneys on this quiet evening in early autumn. The hill is high enough to overlook the whole neighbourhood before them, to the right and to the left. On that rising ground, north-east from Ickleford, is Wilbury Hill, where antiquaries can trace a Roman camp, by reason of the *vallum* which encloses the hill rather than by any vestiges of stockade or fort. Stukeley saw in the spot the site of an early British town, and I doubt not that long before Macaulay's traveller "shall in vain labour to decipher on some mouldering pedestal the name of our proudest chief," somebody will have discovered that Wilbury Hill was a temporary settlement of Phœnician traders who, for once in a way, came farther inland than was their wont, to barter purple with the native women.

Had I visited Hitchin three months ago, a few minutes' stroll from Windmill Hill would have brought me into fields fragrant with flowering lavender, on a spur of the Chiltern Hills. The plants, with long, light green linear leaves, are before me now in great numbers, but their terminal spikes of blossom have been garnered in for the sake of the oil which they yield, and from which lavender water is largely distilled in Hitchin. I believe the only lavender grown for this purpose in England is grown here, and in Surrey; for many years ago the plantations at Market Deeping in Lincolnshire became so badly diseased that their cultivation was stopped. Lavender water has been distilled at Hitchin for nearly eighty years and is, of course, far superior to that distilled elsewhere. To the common lavender (*Lavendula vera*) there is said to be no reference in the classics; but it is mentioned by Hildegard, an abbess and saint who wrote more books than I should care to read, and lived awhile during the 12th century, at Rupertsberg near Bingen on the Rhine. From the lavender fields of Hitchin to Hildegard of Rupertsberg is a far cry, so I ask pardon for the digression as I walk towards Letchworth, where, nearly three hundred years ago, Sir William Lytton built his lordly hall, and to the village of Willian, which is said to owe its name to a Saxon saint. Neither at Letchworth nor at Willian can I stay to talk to men or moralise on monuments, so I pass pretty cottages and prettier gardens as though I regarded such things but lightly, and pause at Willian only to notice how closely its homes are clustered under the shadow of their parish church.

CHAPTER XI

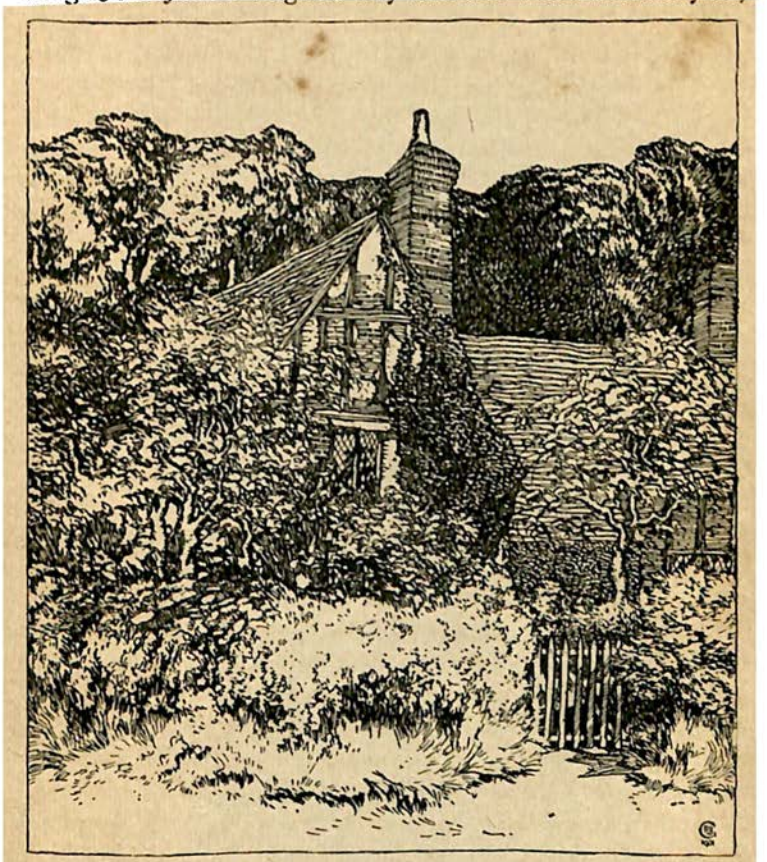
BALDOCK, NEWNHAM, HINXWORTH, ASHWELL

ONCE upon a time a giant, a mighty man of valour, lived in a cave near the village of Weston. He was so tall that when he stalked through the streets of Baldock, as he often did, he would sometimes pause to chat with his friends through the first-floor windows, leaning his arms upon the sill. He was a man of civil speech, a good-tempered fellow so long as he got his own way, and he had many friends. But he held questionable opinions touching the sacredness of property and always took by force such things as he required; so it came to pass at length that he had many enemies also. Sometimes he would walk out to a spot near the little village of Graveley, and there wait for wealthy passers, whom he would despoil of their money or their goods. The men of Graveley call that spot "Jack's Hill" unto this day, because their fathers had in olden time called this tall, bold robber "Jack o' Legs"; but by other men he was called "the Weston Giant." He was so clever with his bow that he could stand at the mouth of his cave and send an arrow through a rook as it sat upon a tree-top half a mile away; and so strong was the bow this giant carried that he could shoot an arrow more than three miles from the place where he stood. For more years than I can tell Jack o' Legs was feared by all strange men and wayfarers who had occasion to pass near his cave or along the road where he watched, for so great was his fame

Hinxworth Place.

that men heard of his deeds long before they drew near to the place where he was. But there came a day when the grievous wrongs done by this robber could no longer be borne; so some men of Baldock lay in wait secretly, and in great numbers, to capture him, for they knew that only by reason of their numbers could they prevail over so strong a giant. Now Jack o' Legs knew not that men sought to compass his death, so one day, very early in the morning, he came down by the road that leads from Weston to Baldock, as he had so often done before. And as he walked between the trees that stood on either side of the street, as they stand now, he at first espied no man, for it had been noised in the town the night before that Jack o' Legs was to be caught, and all those men and women who most feared the giant were mindful to keep indoors until they knew that he was killed or bound fast. But the other men hid themselves in the churchyard. Now the giant walked past the church as though he had a mind to go to Radwell, and knew not that the men lay in wait for him so closely. So after he had gone a few steps they ran from the churchyard as quietly as they could and came behind him, and one who was taller than the rest smote him with a great stick upon the back of the neck so that he fell upon his face as though he were dead. Then they bound his arms and his legs with cords and when he came to himself they told him to prepare for his death. Then Jack o' Legs said, "Let me shoot one arrow from my bow, and where the arrow falls there bury my body when I am dead." So they let him shoot. And no man among them had ever known an arrow shot to so great a distance; for the arrow from the giant's bow soared high over the fields until it struck the tower of Weston Church and fell to the ground. And when they had slain the giant, like good men and true they remembered their word and digged his grave full twelve feet long at the spot where the arrow had fallen. And although the grave was so long they had to double the body before they could get it into its resting place, so great was the stature of the

robber who had lived in the cave at no great distance from the church. This is a true story; and if any man cares to see the grave of Jack o' Legs he may find it in Weston churchyard,



A Cottage Garden at Letchworth.

near the gate, with a stone to mark his head and another to mark his feet, four yards apart.

I have told the story of the Weston giant as it was told to me, and as readers would learn it were they to put together the

several versions which are current in the county. I need hardly point out how closely some of its incidents remind us of the story of Robin Hood; it seems indeed to resemble that classic fable in some such fashion as the story of Hasisadra's adventure resembles the Biblical account of Noah's flood. It is, I think, decidedly the most romantic legend in Hertfordshire, and I cannot blame myself for finding it uppermost in my mind as I stand in the churchyard at Baldock "early in the morning," as those men are said to have done when waiting for Jack o' Legs. As I turn to look round upon the church I notice a grave-board which diverts my thoughts from legend to the uncertainty of life. It bears the words: —

"How soon I was cut down
When innocent at play,
The Wind it blew a ladder down
And took my life away."

Baldock was in Norman days called Baudoc, and the town is said to have been built by the Knights Templars, who acquired the property from the Earl of Pembroke. Here, as at Temple Dinsley, their reign was succeeded by that of the Knights Hospitallers, but not before "Baudoc" had grown into a considerable town. The Templars left behind them many traces of their sojourn in the neighbourhood and some of them lie buried in the church. I am but little disposed to disturb their ashes, or to rake among their records on so fresh a morning; but I must remind readers that they built a lazar-house in the neighbourhood. Few realise that leprosy was once the most dreaded scourge in England. In the days of the Crusades there were nearly a hundred religious lazar-houses in our country; in Hertfordshire, besides those near St. Albans, already mentioned, there were lazar-houses at Hoddesden, at Berkhampstead and here at Baldock. Richard de Wallingford, 28th Abbot of St. Alban's, was a leper, and became at length so loathsome that his monks conspired together and besought the

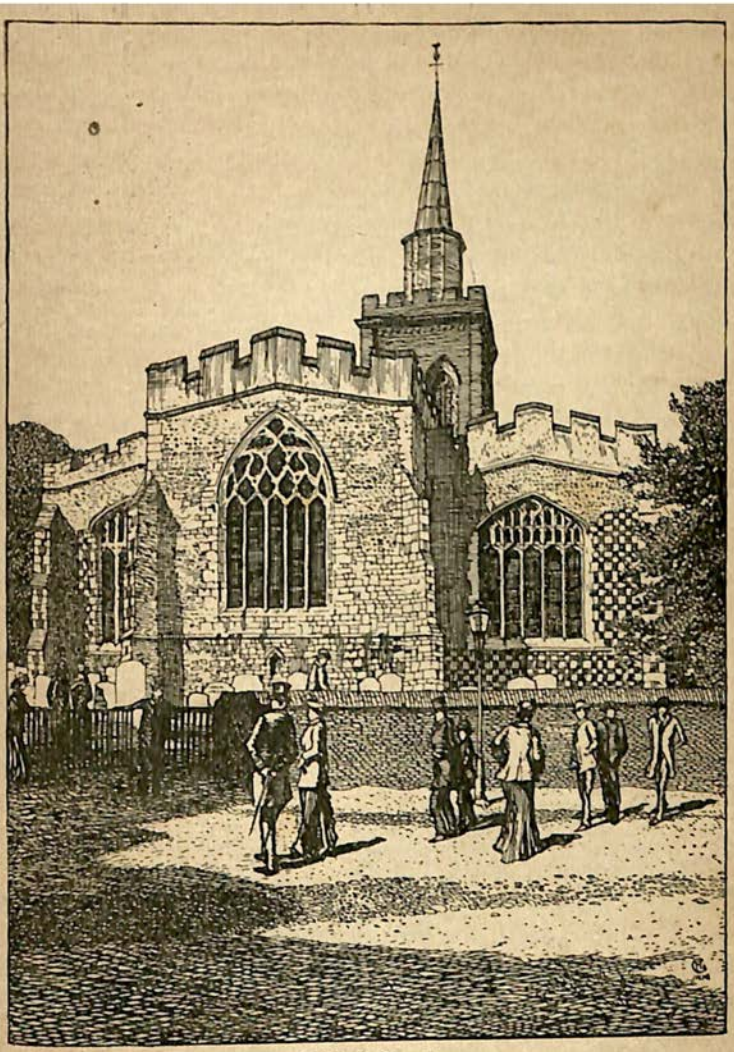
Pope to compass his dismissal; but Edward III. refused to interfere in the matter, and the abbot remained at his post.

It is not easy for us to realise the terrible nature of this disease, or to understand the position of the leper in the middle ages. Hans Holbein the elder, who had probably studied the hideous manifestations of the disease in the leper-houses at Augsburg, painted a wonderful picture which is now at Munich; it represents St. Elizabeth of Hungary feeding a group of lepers with bread and wine, and is perhaps the most realistic of all existing records of the appearance of leprosy in those times. The figures are literal personifications of corruption—a face covered with round and reddish knobs, a festered leg, a rotting arm, and other details equally repulsive. The contagious nature of leprosy has recently been questioned, if not disproved, but the leper in Baudoc was a man whose fellows shunned him as they would have shunned the devil of mediæval days—the devil with horned head, forked tail, and cloven feet. He might drink from no running brook, tread no narrow footpath, nor touch any substance used as food for man, for his touch was pollution. But for the leper himself no offal was unfit. Animals that had died of disease were given him to eat, and fish such as even Mongolians would now scorn to taste was regarded as his fit and proper food. When his disease had attained its worst form he was consigned to a living death from which death itself was a merciful relief. The spot where such lepers dwelt in Baudoc is now covered by some cottages close to the railway, but the memory of the leper-house is kept alive by a narrow thoroughfare called Pest House Lane.

The rectors of Baldock are known to us by name from the days of the Knights Hospitallers. A list of them hangs in the south porch of the parish church, the earliest name being that of John de Stokes, who was instituted in 1317. Although the list is long, I see no name of any eminence; but that of Josias Bird, who became rector in 1613, reminds me of an anecdote.

It is said that when Charles I. was brought through Baldock as a prisoner, under the charge of Fairfax, the cavalcade drew up before the church. The worthy rector, who probably held, as an article of faith, that the fallen monarch was in truth King of England and head of the Church by Divine right, brought to the royal prisoner some wine in the chalice of his church and requested him to refresh himself therewith. The King complied with his request, and, as the story runs, was so kind as to thank the giver and to say that he had not expected to find so good a *bird* in Baldock.

The church of St. Mary is an edifice of considerable interest. The aisles are separated from nave and clerestory by Decorated pillars, and the Perpendicular chancel and its chapels are enclosed by an oaken rood-screen, carved in a bold, free design, but of no great beauty of detail. Some brasses of the 15th century have been much disfigured, nor has time dealt tenderly with the old slab in the nave, on which is graven, in Lombardic characters, an inscription to the memory of Reynaud de Argenthem, concerning whom I know nothing. Lovers of old relics should not fail to visit this church during their rambles in Hertfordshire, for the font is probably far older than the memory of John de Stokes, and framed in one of the chapels are two deeds about 600 years old. One is a grant from "Walter Cateyl of this Town" of an eleemosynary rent charge of 2d. yearly to "the church of the Blessed Mary of Baudoc" and is dated Easter, 1289. Old as that document appears, it is hard to realise that Walter Cateyl was a contemporary of Dante, of Nicholas IV. and of our own Edward I.; but it is easy enough to believe that, even in Baldock, his name is only remembered by this grant, preserved by a church which preserves so much. Just now, when the martial spirit is abroad in our land, visitors to this church are likely to be more deeply stirred by the mural monument to Major George Gall, of the 5th Regiment of Madras Light Infantry. On 13th June, 1857, he was carrying despatches from Lucknow to the



Baldock Church.

Governor-General, and, on reaching Roy Bareilly in Oude, was killed by rebels. There is also an altar tomb in the churchyard to William Clarkson, Esq., who died at Wraby in Lincolnshire in 1837. He was a staunch supporter of that Thomas Clarkson, of Playford Hall in Suffolk, who did so noble a work in connection with the abolition of the slave trade. Nor had he a mind to be forgotten; for he left money to keep his tomb in perpetual repair and for an annual sermon to his memory.

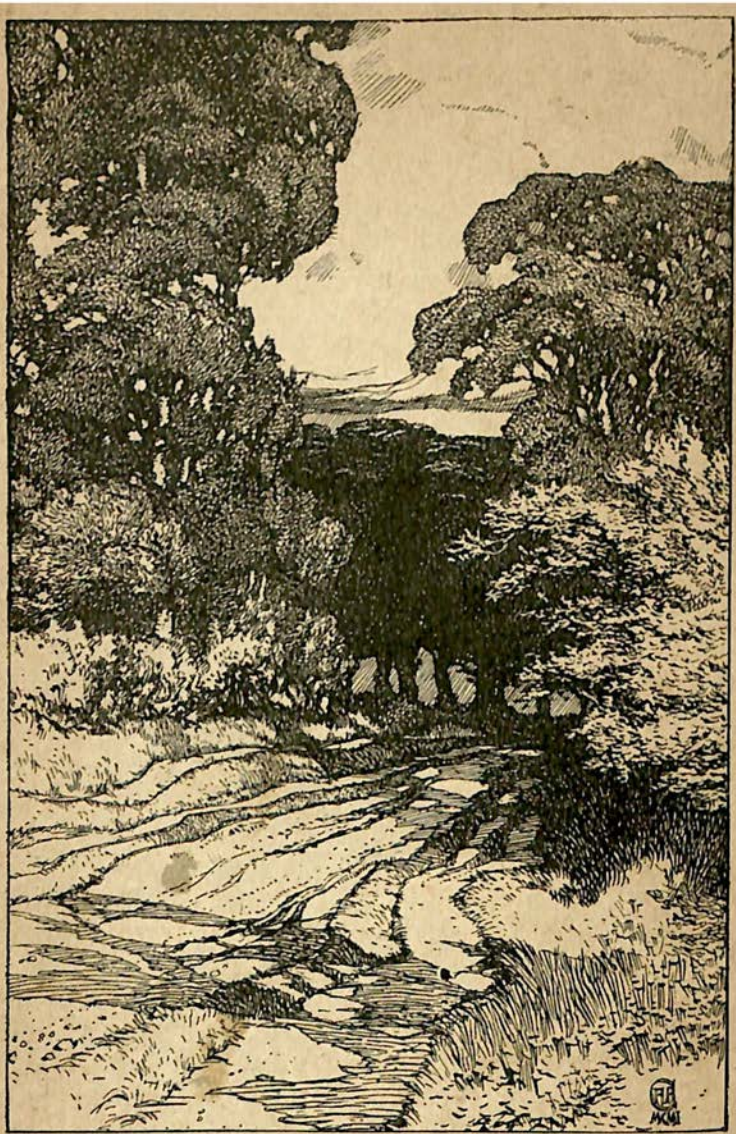
The men of Baldock seem proud of the history of their town, for the arms of the Templars and Hospitallers are placed high upon the new Town Hall. But in the few hours at my disposal I notice little in the aspect of the town which is worthy of note, saving a street which is perhaps wider than any in the county except St. Peter's Street, St. Albans, or High Street, Berkhampstead. In this fine street, shaded on either side by elm and lime, are the Wynne Almshouses, six houses of old red brick, with porches and a common garden but a few feet deep. "*Theis almes howses are the geift of M. John Wynne cittezen and mercer of London latelye deceased who hath left a yeareley stipend to everey poore of either howses to the worldes end September Anno Domine* 1623." "To the world's end"; it may be a long time yet. I hope Mr. Wynne's bequest may never be put to ignoble uses, but those who live longest will see most. Charities, like other good deeds, are the sport of chance and circumstance, and it is a sanguine man who believes that even the endowments of the Church will never be taken from her.

I have said that Baldock has an unusually wide street. It has also, like Hatfield, some extremely narrow ones, from which, at night, little can be seen except the stars immediately above you. In Park Street there are cottages with front and sides of boards, and others, of old red brick, have thatched roofs a foot thick, and dormer windows less than two feet square. As I go up the hill towards *The Compasses* I turn to look back upon the town. It is almost screened from view by the smoke from the many chimneys, but the spire of St. Mary's Church

stands out prominently, high over all, and to the left, in a clearer atmosphere, two malting kilns are conspicuous objects. The trade in malt is not so great as formerly, but it is still considerable. Several slabs in the church are to the memory of men who were "malsters of this town" (a calling deemed honourable enough before the evolution of the teetotaler), men who were much respected in their day, walked according to their light, plied their business diligently, and thanked God for the barley harvest. To the south a range of hills entirely screens from my view the country around Hitchin; to the west, between Wilbury Hill and the village of Stotford, a considerable eminence is crowned by the buildings of the Three Counties Asylum. In my foreground is Baldock Station on the Royston and Cambridge branch of the Great Northern Railway, close to the intersection of the Great North Road and the Roman Icknield Way.

The Compasses is an old inn by the roadside as you go from Baldock towards Radwell. It shines in the story of the district with a reflected glory, for close to it there stood, long ago, a famous mill. Now the miller had, as so many millers *did* have, a pretty daughter—according to all Baldock authorities she was indeed of surpassing beauty. She was called the Maid of the Mill, and many Jasons came in quest of her; but she was not to be lightly won. I am told that a local parson lost his reason when she refused his advances, and that she at length married a "lout of a carpenter."

Leaving the road near *The Compasses*—for I long to feel the grass under my feet again—I wander down into the meadows where the river Ivel, that rises close by, threads its way beneath clumps of willows and stately poplars, hardly murmuring as it goes. It creeps so gently past the sedges here that the leaves which fall upon it travel but a few yards in a minute; but soon it sweeps round to the west and runs towards a mill with increasing speed and volume. Crossing a lane just here I come to a stubble field where I gather a few belated oats and many



The Icknield Way at Cadwell.

white campions to the memory of a dead summer, and when, presently, I come again to the water-side I find that thousands of forget-me-nots are flowering on the surface—frail, beautiful lingerers through a month when flowers of the field and brook are scarce. Some twenty yards before me a clump of dwarf willows overhangs the bank and in among its withes, where they almost touch the water, a moorhen is moving furtively, as if suspicious of my proximity. She sees me before I can get much nearer, dives instantly, runs for a few yards along the opposite bank, and is off for a safer spot, her legs stretched behind her as she flies. So I wander back again for a while: the river once more shrinks to a tiny burn and then, joining a tributary stream, becomes so joyful as it nears the mill that the pleasant valley seems filled with the noise of many waters. I cannot put in words the charm which this valley has for me to-day—the cawing of the rooks, the music of the stream, the rich yet tender tints of the beech, half stript of leaves, and of ash and oak. Across a clear blue sky great masses of white cloud are moving like an army with banners, and, almost hidden from sight among the clouds, the larks are singing as they alone can sing nearly the whole year round "with profuse strains of unpremeditated art." I might stroll westwards for a couple of miles to the village of Norton, thinking, by the way, of Roger de Norton, who was Abbot of St. Alban's when Edward I. held his Court in the town in 1291, but I know nothing about the village to tempt me thither; so I follow the meanderings of the Ivel towards Radwell Mill, and come, after half-an-hour's stroll, to where the river opens out into a broad sheet of water, with islands in its midst. Bald coots, moorhens and dabchicks abound on the islands and in the water, calling to one another almost continually, so tame that one may watch their movements without fear of alarming them. The islands are surrounded by dense herbage which affords them an excellent shelter, and they breed here in the spring in considerable numbers. A public footpath skirts this

lake on the western side and the birds are so accustomed to the sight and sound of passers that they seldom seem to dive suddenly for fear, as is often their habit in more secluded waters.

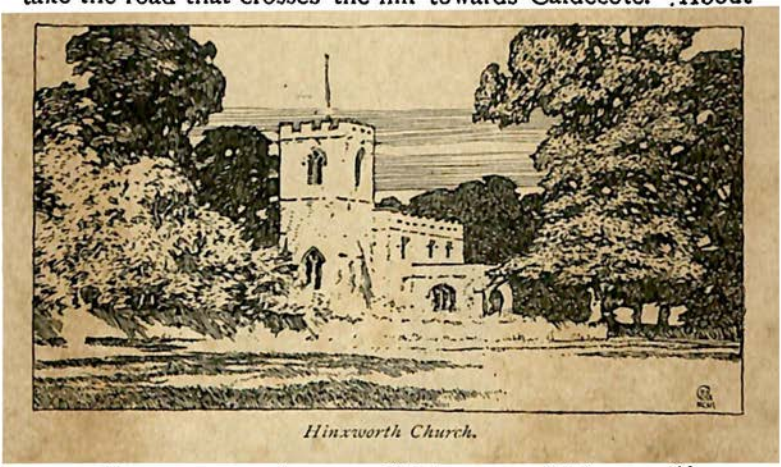
It is still a pleasant, undulating country which surrounds me as I cross the road once more and after looking back to where the willows gleam silver-grey by the Ivel's side, and the wild fowl are still at play near Radwell Mill, make my way to the village of Newnham. The rooks haunt the whole neighbourhood to-day in great numbers, and by their orderly evolutions might lead me to suppose that for once in a way they were about to betake themselves over-seas, to winter under kinder skies. I hear some different cries as I come to a fallow field, and on clapping my hands I startle nearly fifty lapwings, which circle leisurely around in their coats of black and white and finally settle down again at the same spot. I am pleased to find them here, for the lapwing in full plumage is a handsome bird and it will be a pity if the large sales of both eggs and birds in the market should at length tend to its extermination. Some years ago, as is well-known, the lapwing became visibly scarcer, but its numbers have recently again increased. It is certainly more plentiful in Hertfordshire than it was when I went a-birdsnesting in the "seventies." I could never clearly make out the word "peewit," which the cry of the lapwing is said to resemble, and now, as I listen intently to their calling, the notes seem more like "teuchit," a name by which the bird is known in some districts. Prof. Newton has said that "the passage of a flock of lapwings, twinkling aloft or in the distance, as the dark and light surfaces of the plumage are alternately presented, is always an agreeable spectacle to those who love a landscape enlivened by its wild creatures." I have sent them off upon the wing once more, and as they wheel around in the bright sunshine they look sometimes entirely black, and sometimes white. As a rule they utter a shorter, more lonesome cry upon the wing and the

"teuchit" is best heard when the lapwing is upon the ground, running swiftly hither and thither in search of food.

My survey of this northern extremity of Hertfordshire was interrupted by that flock of lapwings, and I must leave them to their diversions and mount the last slope of this winding byway before descending to the little village of Newnham. At this point I can overlook many miles of country—rolling arable land—shaded in many places by clumps of trees. The land, now the harvests are for the most part garnered, save for a few stretches of green turnips half choked with yellow durnell, would be of one monotonous dark-brown hue, were it not for sheep that are penned within folds in the distance, and for the many hedges, still of varied shades of green, which are so characteristic a feature in the landscapes of dear old England. Down in the hollow upon my left are the thatched cottages of the peasants of Newnham, half hidden among the trees. Those cottages, one of which is the "Post Office," with the small church and a dozen homes of newer structure, form the whole village. Newnham has at least one claim upon my notice, for it is one of the very few villages of its size without an inn or beer house of any kind. I get this fact fully corroborated, for a man who is plodding wearily through the village tells me that he can remember when there was plenty of beer in Newnham, but the more noisy fellows *would* quarrel over their pint, and sometimes even "scrapped" in the street, until the Squire, who owns every inch of the soil, declared that no beer should be sold on his property. "I dunno as it matters much, neither. Them as warnts beer goes to *th' Compasses* an' gets it, an' them as don't warnt none goes without. It don't trouble me—leastways not much. When I gets a pot unner my nose I don't spend no time blowin' no 'ead off, but I drinks no beer to speak on now." The man is master of a philosophy which is very useful in this life and I will vouch for it he is not the biggest fool in Newnham.

It is in truth but small beer that I can chronicle among the

chalk hills and small villages hereabouts; for I can call to mind no names of man or woman who made this district famous by the accident of their birth, nor of any fearsome adventures or bloody battle fought out upon this narrow territory which is hemmed in by Bedfordshire in the west and Cambridgeshire in the east. Such deeds of daring as were done in these parts were done long, long ago, in days when no man was happy unless he was in danger. Many Roman relics have been found in this neighbourhood; one great haul I can call to mind as I take the road that crosses the hill towards Caldecote. About



Hinxworth Church.

twenty-five years ago, between Caldecote and Hinxworth, some 500 silver coins were found almost simultaneously, dating from 54 to about 170 A.D.—from Nero to Marcus Aurelius. At Ashwell and at Hinxworth similar treasures have been found in considerable quantities, and you may meet with many a farm labourer or small shopkeeper in those villages who has a Roman coin about him, found in the neighbourhood of his home.

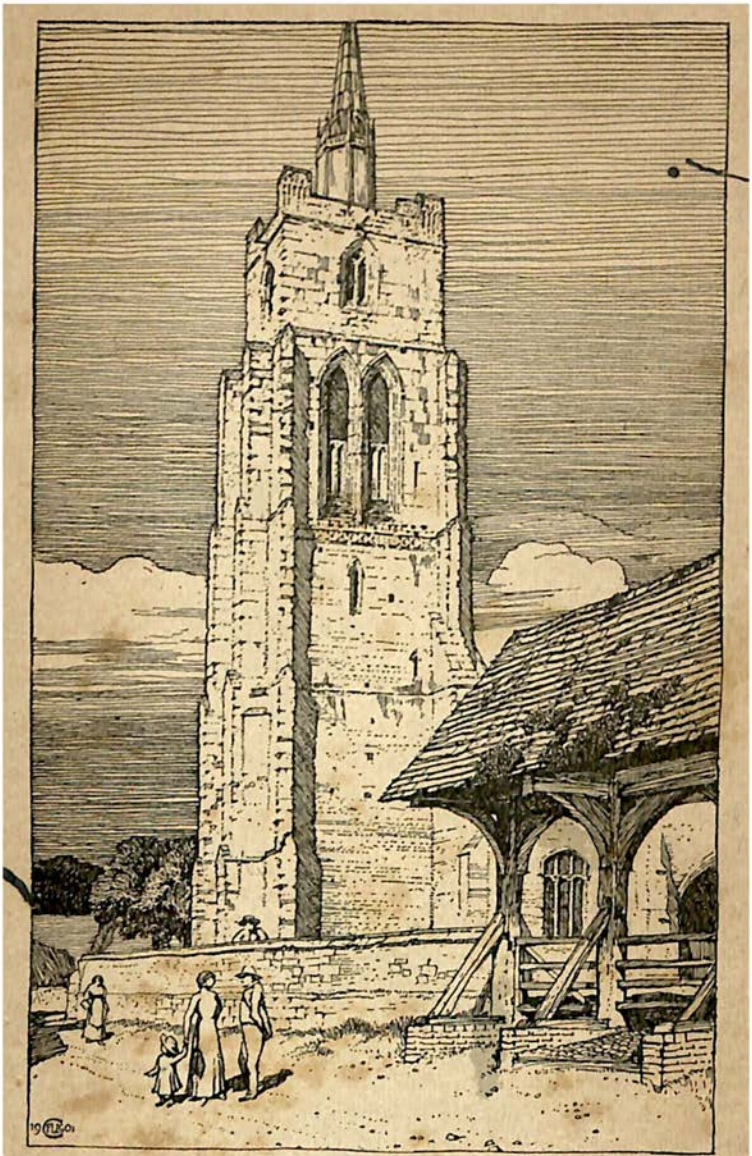
At Caldecote, a little village on the Bedfordshire border, there is nothing which would tempt a poet, unless, indeed, essaying to rival the Ecclesiastical Sonnets of Wordsworth, he

should commemorate the holy water stoup in the church porch, considered to be the finest in the county. It is covered by a Perpendicular canopy, carved and crocketed, and is, as Mr. Whitford Anderson has remarked, an elaborate piece of work for a church in so remote a spot. The font is adorned with shields, one of which bears "a Latin cross, with a crown of thorns surmounting a spear and rod in saltire."

Ashwell is undoubtedly the most interesting spot in the extreme north of Hertfordshire. It is now a village; it was once a town. It lies in a little valley, a mile from the border of Cambridgeshire. The river Rhee rises in its vicinity, in the midst of many ash trees, and soon gathers volume as it runs in a north-easterly direction to join issues with the Cam. Ashwell is of great antiquity—so old that it held its annual fair and its weekly market in the days of William the Conqueror. The church of St. Mary the Virgin has the only tower in the county which is wholly built of stone, unless, while I have been rambling and scribbling by the roadside, somebody has built another. When, in 1714, the spire was re-leaded by one Thomas Everard, the fact was recorded for the benefit of posterity, by a verse in letters of lead, upon the roof—

"Tho. Everard
Laid me here
He said to last
An hundred
year
1714."

Inside the tower there are some words in Latin on the wall, referring to one of the worst visits of the plague, at a time when the Black Death stalked relentlessly through the length and breadth of Europe, and many Jews were massacred because they were believed to have poisoned wells. The west of England had been attacked the year before, and when it reached the Midlands, Ashwell was one among many places where its horrors were experienced. But Ashwell had no Defoe to

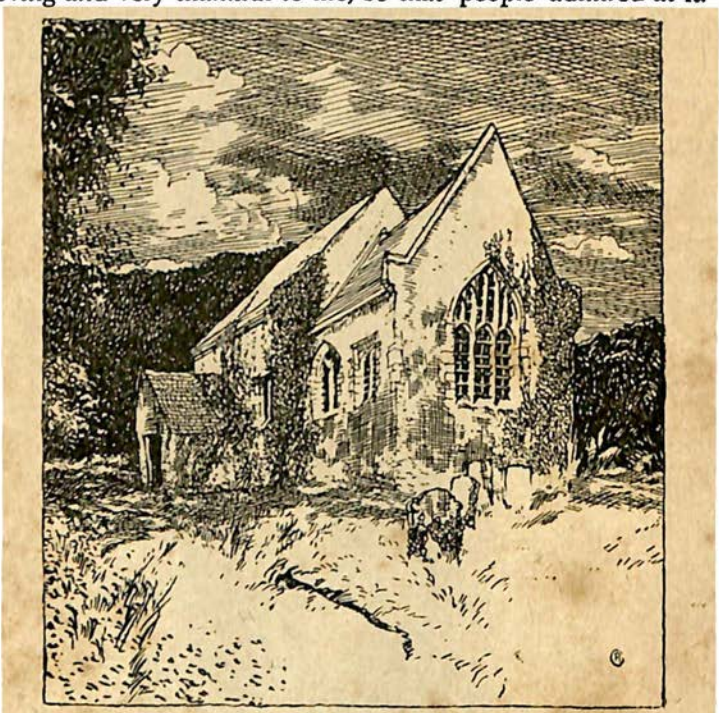


Ashwell Church.

chronicle her woes and, so far as I am aware, we are ignorant of the extent of her losses in those terrible days.

Having returned to Baldock after my excursion into the neighbourhood of Newnham, I pick up a little book containing some extracts from the *Journal of George Fox*, and from other Quaker literature, touching the persecutions suffered here by the Friends. It appears that the officers of the law sometimes broke into meetings, and tried to force those present to sign the Oath of Allegiance. This their tenets would not allow them to do, and so, on one occasion, Thomas Baldock, Jeremy Laundy, John Passel and many others were shamefully handled and finally dragged out of the meeting by main force. They were taken to an inn, kept without beds all night, and the next day conveyed to Hertford. Here, for a few hours, they were better treated and lodged; but were taken from their beds in the middle of the night and committed to the town gaol on the warrant of two justices. George Fox was himself at Baldock in 1655, and had some rough experiences —as he usually did, go where he would. "When we came to Baldock in Hertfordshire I asked if there was nothing in that town, no profession, and it was answered me, 'There were some Baptists and a Baptist woman sick.' John Rush, of Bedfordshire, went along with me to visit her, and when we came in there were many people in the house that were tender about her, and they told me she was not a woman for this world, but if I had anything to comfort her concerning the world to come I might speak to her. So I was moved by the Lord God to her and the Lord raised her up again to the astonishment of the town and country. Her husband's name was Baldock. This Baptist woman and her husband came to be convinced and many hundreds of people have been at meetings at their house since. Great meetings and convincements there were up and down in these parts afterwards and many people received the Word of Life. . . . . We went back to our inn and there were two desperate fellows fighting so

furiously that none durst come nigh to part them, but I was moved in the Lord's power to go to them, and when I had loosed their hands I held one of them by one hand and the other by the other hand, and I showed them the evil of their doings and reconciled them one to the other, that they were loving and very thankful to me, so that people admired at it."

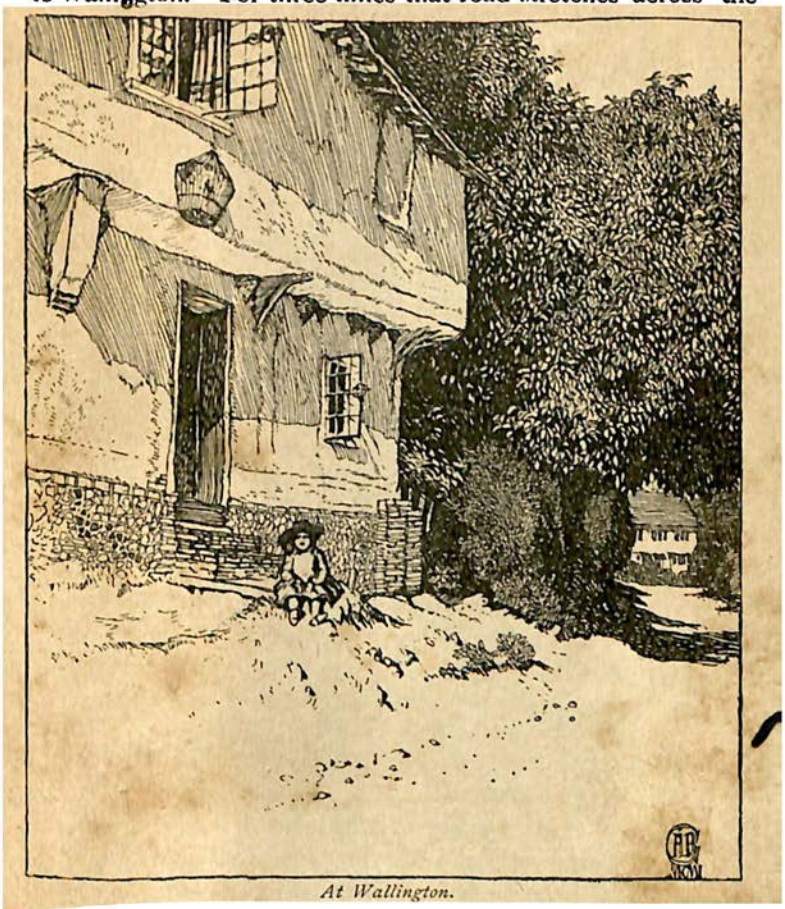


Bygrave.

It is sweet to carry with me the memory of a good deed—a deed done by one who had been advised by the clergy of Leicester to "drink beer and dance with the girls," presumably because, by so doing, he would be less likely to trespass upon their pastoral prerogatives.

On a crisp October morning I take the high road from Bal-

dock to Buntingford, but leave it on reaching the first sign-post, which stands at the beginning of a road that leads me to Wallington. For three miles that road stretches across the



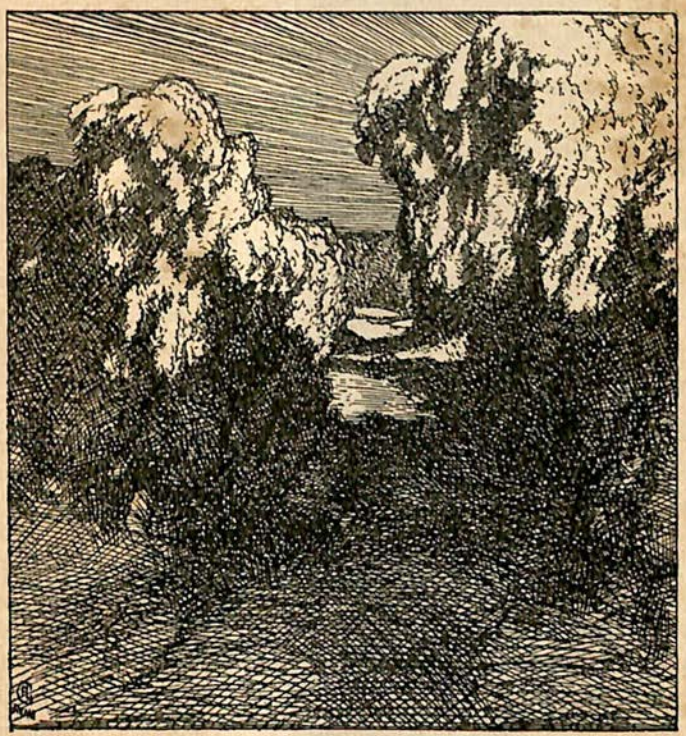
At Wallington.

fields, and it needs but little imagination to fancy myself once again rambling over Sussex downs, for there is no hedge on either hand for some distance, only a low, artificial bank, overgrown with weeds and wild flowers, now mostly run to seed.

A breeze which might well put a new heart into any man sweeps across this open country from the Chiltern Hills. To my left are the railroad and the Icknield Way, leading to Royston —a town partly in Cambridgeshire, said to owe its name to Dame Roesia, who placed a cross there eight hundred years ago, and who was remembered when houses multiplied near the monastery of Eustace de Mere in the days of Henry II., for the place became known as Roise's Town. After passing a pleasant hollow, dotted with many ricks and haunted by linnets, the road rises towards a wooded ridge and then descends steeply between high hedges, shaded by higher ash. Here the ground is so thickly strewn with leaves that my footfall is hardly audible. The land seems hushed to perfect silence, broken only at times by the sound of birds, or by the report of a rifle in a distant field. I have seen no man, nor woman neither, since leaving the road to Buntingford.

The village of Wallington is little more than the church, the *Plough Inn*, and a few humble homes—there are several thousands of such villages in England. It stands upon a slope, and, in striking contrast to so much of the scenery between here and Baldock, the lower end of the village lane—I cannot call it a street—is in a leafy hollow. Just below the *Plough Inn* the hedge is almost choked by the hops which clamber over it, and an old woman who is gathering sticks tells me that they grew there more luxuriantly once. I am told, too, that people in Wallington live as long as they please; there is a woman now in the village who is eighty-six years of age, and "takes in washin' reglar." In the parish church, dedicated to St. Mary, there are some sadly mutilated monuments, but as experts have warned me that it is of no great interest, architectural or historic, I loiter with an easy conscience among a few folk beside the village spring, which being surrounded by a low circular wall, is a fitting spot for local assemblies. I learn, among other things, that there are no schools anywhere in the

neighbourhood, save those of the church, for "there arn't no chapel people in these parts." I forbear to smile in the face of my informer, but am reminded of a sentence, written with a very different reference, in Johnson's *Life of Milton:* "With what limitations this universality is to be understood, who shall inform us?"



A Byway—Morning.

CHAPTER XII

Clothall, Weston, Ardeley, Walkern, Bennington, Aston

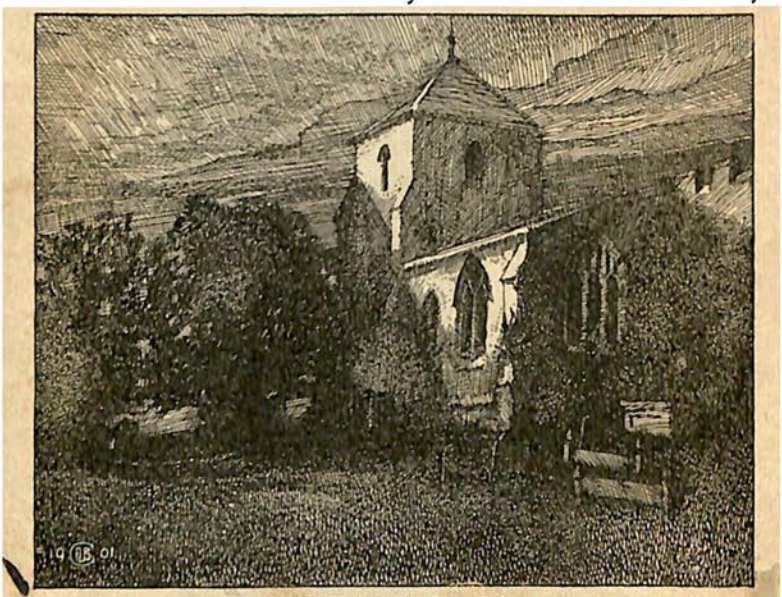
He is a wise man indeed who never loses his way, and I am glad to bear the adage in mind, for I certainly lost mine after leaving Wallington. I set out to walk to Clothall, and here I am in the hamlet of Red Hill. A garrulous, unsophisticated old loafer, who, with more extensive friendships might well be the Pepys of his day, has been at great pains to set me upon my right road, and, doubting not that his company is welcome, has offered to escort me as far as to *The Moon and Stars* at Rushden. How we passed the next hour after reaching the village is best known to ourselves; but I may place on record my indebtedness to one who has described in graphic and forcible language the exact trend of all footpaths, lanes and roads which will lead me to the several villages whose names I have placed at the head of this chapter.

The church of St. Mary at Rushden is not one of the most interesting in the county, but it has Decorated and Perpendicular features not devoid of merit and contains a monument to Sir Adolphus van Meetkerke, which was formerly in St. Botolph's, Aldersgate. Sir Adolphus was a Brussels man, and was sent by the States-General as Ambassador to England. How he behaved himself in this country I do not know, and it certainly does not matter much now; so I strike out boldly for the village of Clothall leaving some future student to investigate the virtues of Sir Adolphus van Meetkerke.

It is as well to be socially inclined sometimes, and I am not sorry when a turn in the road brings me suddenly to the side of one of a class not often eulogised upon tablets of stone. He is a big raw-boned fellow, wearing a morning coat which may once have been black, but which is now more akin to brown. It is tied together at the top button-hole with a piece of thick string, for of buttons it has none. He carries a bundle in a red handkerchief, and wears a straggling black beard of perhaps a month's growth. He tells me that he has done much "sheening" (*i.e.* tending the threshing machine) in his time, and that he has spent the greater part of his five and forty years wandering from place to place in Hertfordshire. "Sometimes, when I'm sheening I get three an' a tanner a day, an' me beer; but ther's them 's *woon't* pay no more'n two an' six, an' p'raps don't give no beer neither. An' pubs ain't wot they was. I 'ave bin in places w'ere I could 'ave a shake down for a night or two, an' get a few pots on tick, so long's the boss know'd there was sheening goin' on up at the farm. But there, Lord love us, that's all past an' done. Wot yer want *now*, mate, yer pays for; and if yer last tanner was spent for beer it don't do to be in any 'urry for another wet. . . . No, I don't live with no relatives, an' I don't live nowher' pertickler. I know lots of chaps as go 'arvesting reg'ler, an' if you was to set me on a job next 'arvest out Tring way, or W'itel, or Wel'n, or 'Emel 'Empstead, like's not I'd tell yer the names of 'alf the jokers what you'd find there." The man tells me that he sometimes earns a copper by playing on his brass whistle outside an inn, and I judge that he plays exceedingly well, for before we come to where our ways part I have an opportunity of listening to the strains of "Come, ye thankful people, come." I leave him playing his whistle immediately beneath the sign-board of an inn which I need not name.

Between Rushden and Clothall my road varies continually, leading me now over freshly ploughed fields where birds are picking up worms with great zest; now between hedges laden

with clematis, and now into a higher country from whence I can survey the neighbourhood for many miles round. When at length I reach the Church of England schools at Clothall, an ivy-covered house with a flagstaff before it, I feel that I have reached what is perhaps the quietest district in Hertfordshire. As I wend my way past a few cottages there is nobody to be seen but some children, who follow me to the gateway that leads to the little church of St. Mary. It is late in the afternoon,



Clothall Church—Evening.

and already the sun is sinking behind Hitchin and one or two lamps gleam from the windows of Clothall cottages. A pipistrelle is darting about in the dusk, backwards and forwards, as if he has lost his way and despairs of ever finding it again. The church is one around which anybody might well love to linger, asking such questions touching our hereafter as have been asked amid solemn scenes since the world began, and perhaps finding it "eloquent of still replies." It is an old church, largely Perpen-

dicular, with a chantry chapel on its southern side, which, however, is partly Decorated. The walls are of flint and red brick, with a low tower having a quadrangular tiled roof, surmounted by a large vane. There are two fine brasses of priests in vestments, one of which bears date 1404 and the other 1519, and there are two or three besides of later date.

In the chantry at Clothall the brackets for candles are still upon the wall, and serve to remind one of the purpose of these interesting old chapels. Many of them originated in the 14th and 15th centuries. I write *originated* because, as is well known, they were not as a rule built as new annexes, but were portions of already existing churches set aside for a special purpose. In the middle ages folk who were sufficiently rich would obtain permission to set up a private altar in a secluded corner of the parish church, and would pay for masses to be there sung for the benefit of their dead relatives. Such chapels therefore became family burial places, and the tomb of one of those for whom masses were sung would often be used as the altar. The fees for singing masses in chantry chapels were a welcome addition to the income of many priests whose tithes had been diverted into the hands of abbots and abbesses, and it was no small benefit to such when warriors slain in battle during the 15th century were found to have left benefactions for this purpose. Frequently, however, the mass would be celebrated by a priest not connected with the parish church, and where such was the case the chantry could usually be entered from the outside by a separate door. What varied devices mankind has invented to minister to minds diseased by grief! I can fancy how, in this quiet village among the hills, some hearts were comforted day by day with the knowledge that the one who had gone into that valley which is dark indeed was prayed for efficaciously in the tiny chapel on this rising ground, for how could the soul be safer than in the keeping of Holy Church?

I cannot think that any man could wander from Baldock to

Hertford in fine weather without feeling that it is sweet to be abroad in a neighbourhood of so many charms. As I turn away from Clothall Church the moon is rising behind some white-edged clouds, and before I have climbed to the first bend in the road those clouds have moved away or perished, and the whole heavens are bare—one vast expanse of greyish-blue, with here and there a star that twinkles feebly in the moon's glory. Turning to look down upon the village I see nothing but a dozen cottage roofs, and the church beyond in consecrated ground. That ground is, I doubt not, consecrate in a very special sense to those who have a parent, a lover, a child resting within its precincts; but on such a night as this I can but feel that the common wayside is holy too, if only we will think so. Surely this harebell, withstanding the chills of autumn in a sheltered hollow of the low bank, is more wonderfully made than any sacred vessel in yonder church, and the drama of life enacted daily in the village is fraught with issues at least as momentous as those of any mass ever said or sung.

I reach the village of Weston after a moonlight walk and pass from end to end of the long, straggling village, noticing, among other things, the signboard of the *Live and let Live* and the small meeting house of the Catholic Apostolic Church. It will be time to seek my inn when I am weary, which is not yet, so I saunter slowly down the lane that will lead me in the morning towards Walkern, and turning to the right at the parish schools, follow a narrow footpath until I find myself in Weston churchyard. I have but one object in visiting this spot, and that is to find the grave of Jack o' Legs. A boy who is standing near the gate grins from ear to ear as I broach the subject of the local hero and leads me to the place. Here, sure enough, almost hidden among the grass, are the two stones to which I referred at the beginning of my last chapter, about twelve feet apart. "They 'ud be most three times as far apart, only w'en they was puttin' 'im down they 'af to double 'im twice afore 'e 'ud go in.

It was 'ere as the arrer fell, cos it 'it the church first and then came off this way." Here, at least, is one who is unwavering in his belief of the wonderful story of the life and death of Jack o' Legs, and who, if the adventures of Ulysses were set before him in simple prose, would probably regard them as of inferior merit.

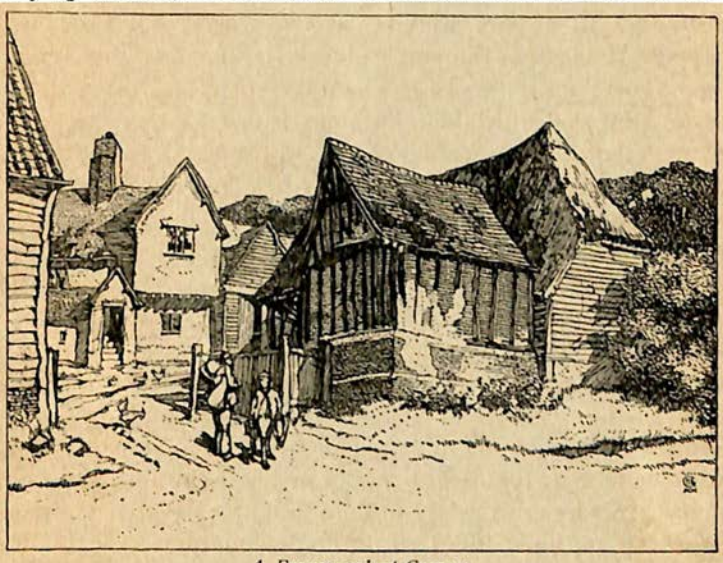
I can but think it an odd coincidence that near the reputed grave of one who was a mighty man of valour with the bow there should be a record in the church porch stating that the patronage of Weston Church was given to the Knights Templars by Gilbert Strongbow, Earl of Pembroke, who died in 1148. He was father to that Richard Strongbow who landed near Waterford in 1170, bent on subduing Ireland. I think it is Clutterbuck who records that this warrior was Lord of the Manor of Weston. The rectors of the parish are known at least by name almost from the days of Richard Strongbow, one Robert de Mannyton having been instituted in 1209. How continually, when visiting these old churches, the mind is carried back to the dawn of what is strictly speaking English history—to the period when our country ceased to be the battlefield where men of many nationalities fought and died, and began to mould the lineaments of a race destined to become mightier than them all. The famous passage in which Macaulay wrote of the Church of Rome as the only institution left standing which carries the mind back to the sacrifices of the Pantheon and the camelopards and tigers of the Flavian amphitheatre has often occurred to me during my visits to English churches, for we might describe the antiquity of our own Establishment in language equally boastful, if less eloquent. For the history of learning in England is in the main the history of that Church which for more than a thousand years was almost the sole educator of the people. Such reflections are inevitable in almost any of our more ancient parishes; and here, in the long, straggling village of Weston, I may seek in vain for the records of any other institution, or even for any

local tradition which takes me back to the epoch of Robert de Mannyton,—to the excommunication of John by Innocent III., to the gathering of the first Franciscans around the cell of their founder, near the Church of St. Maria degli Angeli, to the Council which burned the metaphysics of Aristotle, to the days of the Albigenses and of Jenghiz Khan.

Weston is one of those villages lying away from the great high road, in which the spirit of the age penetrates but slowly. I hear, indeed, of one who is "at the front," but very little happens throughout the year to break the monotony of village life. There are some places where the young folk seem to be more contented with their lot than is always the case elsewhere: they grow to manhood and womanhood in the home which saw their birth, and there they still linger in the evening of their days. A genial, humorous old gentleman in Weston tells me that he was born and bred in the village, and that his sire and grandsire were born and bred here also. His own life seems typical of the class of persons in my mind just now. He has no interests outside of his own village; he has seldom been to London, and says, with evident pride, that he knows more than one man who has never been there at all.

I am even more forcibly reminded that there are still places uninfluenced by the Board School or the Salvation Army as I renew my wanderings early in the morning. For after tramping over two or three miles of tortuous, muddy lanes, through which no bicycle could carry me,—lanes which promise to lead to nowhere, which never stretch straight before me for more than a hundred yards, and which seem haunted solely by chaffinches and wrens,—I come at length to a spot from which I look down over the hamlets of Cromer and Lufen Hall. I write "over," for the neighbourhood is bosky, and undulating, and although the places are just below me, to the east, I can see nothing save the smoke from one tall chimney, and the windmill whose sails are moving merrily round on the hillside beyond Cromer. The few miles of hill and dale

between Weston and Ardeley make up a charming picture when viewed from a convenient vantage ground, a picture which is considerably enhanced by the presence of the windmill, of which there are few in the county. The farmhouse and cottages at Lufen Hall are at the foot of a hill, and nobody is abroad except a man who is binding straw. Thinking to pass the time o' day with a native, I knock at a cottage door halfway up the hill, but the dame who answers is too deaf to talk



A Farm-yard at Cromer.

with and can neither read nor write. So I retrace my steps as far as to the sign-post which directs me to Walkern, and turn to look towards Cromer, where a cart is lumbering slowly up the hill, followed by a tall man with a truss of straw upon his head. I am less than two miles from Ardeley and nearer still to Ardeley Bury, where if there is but little to see, there is much to remember.

To mention Ardeley, or to think of Ardeley Bury, is to call to mind the Chauncys, a good Hertfordshire family, whose

talents were exercised in several spheres of usefulness. First, though not foremost from the standpoint of literary or historic importance, was old Charles, somewhat renowned in his day as a Nonconformist divine. Where he was born I am unable to say; he was baptised in the church here on 5th November, 1592. He was an indefatigable reader and student, and was eminent as an oriental and classical scholar. For some time he gave the benefit of his learning to the townsmen of Ware; but managed to fall foul of Archbishop Laud, as so many pastors did, and was summoned to appear before the High Commission Court on two occasions. I believe the precise nature of his misdemeanours, theological or political, is known to the learned, with whom I leave them. However trivial we might deem them now, they were heinous offences in the eyes of Laud, and Charles Chauncy was deprived of his living and placed in prison. I am sorry to remember that he was but a weak-kneed brother, and presently, finding that to *him*, at least, stone walls did make a prison, he submitted in the most abject manner before the mitred bigot. For this humiliation he never forgave himself. In 1637 he landed at Plymouth in New England, where he became for a short time an assistant pastor, going from thence to a town called Scituate. There he preached for several years, and then, the Puritans having triumphed over their enemies, the men of Ware besought their pastor to return. But his work now lay elsewhere. He was almost on the point of embarking for England when he was invited to become President of Harvard College—a position for which he was eminently qualified—and in November, 1654, he was installed as the second President of that now famous institution. At Harvard he laboured for the rest of his life, and dying there in 1672, was buried at New Cambridge. He was a rare and racy preacher of the old sort, whose mouth uttered quaint sayings in abundance, and who kept tongue and pen alike busy. The *Plain Doctrine of the Justification of a Sinner in the Sight of God*, was one of his productions—

doubtless a pithy, profitable, and long discourse, which probably no man or woman now in Hertfordshire has ever read, and which rests in a few libraries in a repose almost as deep as the bones of its author.

I turn to a Chauncy whose writings are still remembered and consulted. Sir Henry Chauncy, the first historian of Hertfordshire, was born in London in 1632. Some handbooks teach that he was born at Ardeley, others say at Bishop's Stortford, but "thus they relate, erring," as Milton says touching the fate of Mulciber. He was a grandson of Charles the parson; wrestled with the niceties of grammar at the High School of Bishop's Stortford, and trod the more open paths of learning at Caius College, Cambridge; was called to the Bar in 1656, and became in course of time Justice of the Peace for the County of Hertford, a Bencher at the Middle Temple, and first Recorder of Hertford Town. He would have followed the example of many of his contemporaries if, after being knighted by Charles II. in 1681, he had spent his days in ignoble ease; but the work which made his name famous was certainly for the most part compiled and written after that event. In the year 1700 there was published in London *The Historical Antiquities of Hertfordshire*," &c., of which only 500 copies were printed, and which is now as rare as the dotteril plover. Fortunately for some of us, whose purses are not commensurate with our book-buying instincts, the work was reprinted in two octavo volumes in 1827, and published at Bishop's Stortford. When, on May 21st, 1719, Chauncy died here at Ardeley, the world certainly lost one who had traded well with the talent which had been entrusted to him—one to whom every subsequent writer on Hertfordshire has been deeply indebted. His ashes rest at Ardeley; the fine old Elizabethan manor house in which he lived and wrote was rebuilt in 1815.

Another branch of the family tree bore Maurice Chauncy, visionary, writer and Carthusian monk. Some not very decorous doings were his during early days as a student of law at Gray's

Inn, which seem to have given rise to remorse in the heart of the doer, for he entered the monastery of the Charterhouse. He was destined to be much tossed about in this world of vicissitudes, a process which commenced when the monks gave up their prerogatives and property at the bidding of the King. Chauncy journeyed to Flanders and there threw in his lot with the monks at Bruges, who had been ejected from their monastery at Shene. When, in the reign of Mary Tudor, they returned to their old home Brother Maurice became their prior. Again the times changed, and the manners with them; Elizabeth became Queen and Carthusian and other monks had to make room for far different, if not always wiser or better, men. Prior Chauncy and his fraternity again sought a refuge under the shadow of the belfry at Bruges—only to be disturbed shortly afterwards by the militant zealots of Calvinism. Chauncy retired to Louvain, where he and his brethren enjoyed the protection of Don John of Austria. After a while, however, we hear of him again at Bruges; there, in 1581, he died, and there, if memory serves me correctly, he was buried. Wood ascribes to Maurice Chauncy the authorship of *A Book of Contemplacyon, the whiche is clepyd the Clowde of Unknowyng*; but the work is believed to be of a much earlier date.

I cannot dismiss the name of Chauncy from my page just yet, and that for a most excellent reason. For the trend of my somewhat sentimental journey leads me next to Walkern, and the trial of Jane Wenham of Walkern at the instigation of Sir Henry Chauncy was the last trial for witchcraft held in England. It was in the year 1712. The Rev. Francis Bragge of Hitchin was a witness against the supposed witch, and was afterwards the author of a pamphlet which was bought in great numbers and read with avidity. The whole story, viewed from this distance of time, is so utterly foolish and contemptible that we can only wonder how learned and able men could occupy themselves with its investigation; and were it not that history teems with other cases equally foolish, we might suppose the

details of the trial and condemnation of Jane Wenham grossly exaggerated. Chauncy had committed the woman to Hertford gaol on a charge of witchcraft, and according to the extraordinary evidence adduced at her trial she was a witch indeed. Anne Thorn, a girl of sixteen years of age, had dislocated her knee. It was alleged that one day, as she was sitting before the fire by reason of the weakness of her limb, she suddenly bounded out of the house, ran swiftly down the road for about half a mile, jumped a high gate with ease, and returned home after an absence of only six or seven minutes, bringing with her, wrapped in her apron, some sticks which she had gathered by the way! In the eyes of Hertfordshire experts this was in itself ample proof that Anne Thorn had been subjected, at the bidding of some naughty wizard or witch, to the tender mercies of the Evil One or his emissaries. Nor was evidence wanting to prove that the perpetrator of this wickedness was a witch and none other than Jane Wenham of Walkern. For Jane had been vigorously attacked by the infuriated Anne, and her flesh was not as the flesh of womankind, for the sound of Anne's finger-nails against her face was as the sound of "scratching" against a wainscot. Nor was this unaccompanied by other wonders. A "gentleman"—in point of fact Mr. Arthur Chauncy—kindly made a little experiment for his own satisfaction, and by repeatedly burying a pin to the head in Jane Wenham's arm proved conclusively that she bore pain without flinching, that she shed no blood when wounded, and that she must therefore be a witch. Here was cumulative and circumstantial evidence which none could gainsay, but there was more behind. It was found that poor Jane could not repeat the Lord's Prayer correctly and, most ominous of all this damning evidence, cats were wont to lurk in her presence in a most peculiar manner. What need had an enlightened jury of any further witnesses? Jane Wenham was declared, after full, and of course impartial hearing, to be guilty of personal intercourse with the father of lies, who conversed with her in the

likeness of a cat, and the jury considered her worthy of death. I am pleased to be able to record that Judge Powell thought otherwise, and that having formally sentenced her to die the death of a witch, he sought and obtained her a pardon. Her case came to the notice of Col. John Plumer (an ancestor of Lamb's Plumers), who ten years before had purchased the estate of New Place at Gilston, a dozen miles from the scene of the trial, and the Colonel permitted the "witch" to live peacefully in a cottage on his estate. As I have said, this woman of Walkern was the last person ever arraigned before English justices on so foolish a charge. Perhaps it is as well for many that they can even now be ignorant with impunity, for if an inaccurate repetition of the Lord's Prayer involved a young woman in a trial for witchcraft, such trials would still occur with considerable frequency. Readers of *Sesame and Lilies* will remember a pertinent illustration on which I need not dwell.

Thinking of this strange story of bygone days I have entered the village of Walkern near its pretty vicarage, where a well-balanced cedar overshadows the lawn, surrounded by beech and chestnut trees, the house itself being covered by several creepers, now of every autumnal shade and hue. "Dear Autumn," wrote Mrs. Hemans when a girl, and we can sympathise with her love for the dying year. This spot seems to have caught the spirit of the season fully; as I linger in the main street there is a quietness brooding over Walkern which can hardly be habitual. Before the doorway of a shop an old man is sitting in a dogcart that has seen its best days, and is reading the news over a pipe as though he intends to delay his further journeyings until a more convenient season. Close by there is a long, barn-like building, somewhat dilapidated, bearing a notice more in touch with the days of Jane Wenham than of this present year of grace 1901: "Notice is hereby given that all persons taken up as vagrants will pursuant to the Acts of Parliament relative to such offenders be com-

mitted to the House of Correction till the next Quarter Sessions or such period as to the magistrates shall seem proper and will be kept to hard labour during their confinement." Let me turn down this by-street towards the church or I may get into serious trouble for loitering in the village of Walkern.

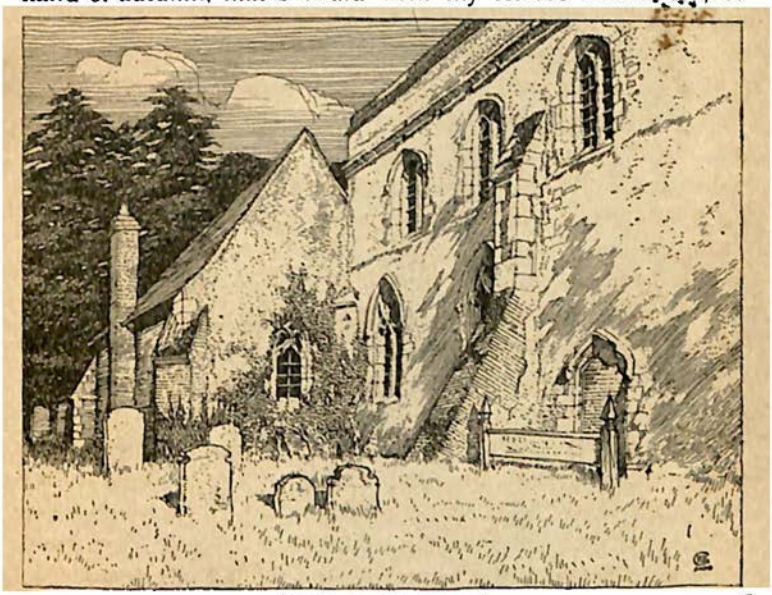
Fallen leaves lie thick upon the ground as I seek the hand bridge over the river Beane, and falling leaves are drifting everywhere before the wind, thick as the motes that caught the eye of Chaucer. And lo! the river is not to be seen, for its springs, which rise near by, dried up early in the summer. I cross the river bed on foot, so dry is it, and am delighted to see a fine kingfisher perched upon the bridge near the vicarage garden. He is off almost immediately, like an arrow from a bow, the beautiful light blue upon his back flashing brightly in the sun. A tourist, who was watching the bird from a distance, is enthusiastic in his praises of the village and its neighbourhood, and speaks of the old-world charm of its long winding street, the beautiful surroundings of the vicarage, and the quaint architecture of many of the cottages and of the fine old Manor House which is now a farmer's home. He reminds me that there are several interesting monuments in the church, and that the building itself has retained a portion of its original Norman structure through all its vicissitudes and renovations. Among the monuments are those of Daniel Gorsuch and his wife, in a posture of reverence, and a marble effigy of a knight in mail armour, which is believed to have been placed here to the memory of one who died 700 years ago, of a family bearing the name of Lanvalei. Much as I care for the dignity of Hertfordshire I cannot pretend that these names help us to recall any great deeds, any "mortal combat or career with lance," nor, so far as I am aware, is there much to be said concerning the private merits or public services of the Humberstones, several of whom have brasses to their memory in this church.

I reach the village of Bennington early in the afternoon.

As I pass the pond near the National Schools a small bird which I do not recognise is perched on a branch of a weeping willow. The incident is insignificant, but it serves to remind me that Mr. Chapman once saw a flock of fourteen crossbills on some fir trees near this village. Bennington now comprises but a few cottages with a tiny greensward in their midst, situated on rising ground, with the parish church and a fine old mansion at its south-west corner. It can hardly have been so unimportant a place a thousand years ago; for in the ninth century it was a residence of Mercian Kings, and a council was held here in 850. This was shortly before the death of Berthulf, who succeeded Wiglaf as King of Mercia in 839. A brief but stormy reign was his. The Danes were then in the land, and it must have seemed doubtful whether they would ever finally quit our shores. One day there was much mounting in hot haste at Bennington, and in many another spot; for a messenger had ridden hard bearing the news that 350 Danish vessels had arrived in the mouth of the Thames. Bad tidings ever travel fast and it was not long before it was noised abroad that the enemy had landed in earnest; that they had stormed London; that they had captured Canterbury. Then King Berthulf arose, summoned the hero that was in him, and gathered his warriors together to battle. King and army marched to meet the Danes and I am sorry to have to say that my ancestors were badly defeated. Henry of Huntingdon tells us that the King was inconsolable by reason of his failure and died soon afterwards. He had a son named Beortferth, who, at about the time when his father's troubles were at their height, murdered his kinsman, Saint Wistan. Berthulf was succeeded by Burhred, but I know nothing of his reign and am not sure that he ever lived at Bennington.

The church of St. Peter, "an interesting 14th century edifice, having a nave with a clerestory, a chancel, a chapel on the north side and a western tower," is so beautifully covered by

creepers and stands in so pleasant a spot that I feel but little inclination to enter it to-day. I pass through the little gateway that leads to the churchyard, and stroll here and there under the spell of some elusive, indefinable charm. I see no name upon headstone or grave-board that speaks of fame acquired either by sword or pen; but the whole neighbourhood is so peaceful, so exquisitely sobered and chastened by the hand of autumn, that I could wish my leisure unlimited; so



Bennington Churchyard.

should this quiet village afford me a retreat from a noisy world, and I would strive to realise Spenser's "Sweet inn from care and wearisome turmoil." Before me, as I stand near the chancel, are a few cottages, where two or three old women are chatting industriously; but there is hardly another sound to tell that the village is a village indeed. Presently, retracing my steps for a few minutes, I pass the sign-post that points the way to Hertford and to Ware,—it is seven and a

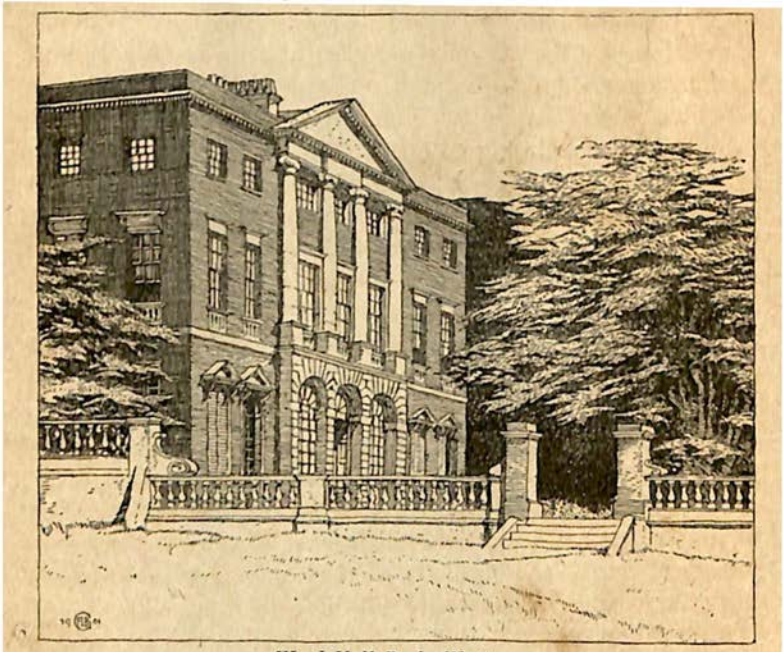
half miles to either town—listening as I go to the songs of the robins, who always seem to love such spots as this, and to the cawing of the rooks high overhead. I turn down the Hertford road, but not a hundred yards from the sign-post stands the *Bell Inn*, beyond which there are but few signs of human habitation, so I return to the precincts of the church, linger awhile beneath its wonderful old yew, and passing to the farther corner of the grave-yard, find myself before the large red-brick mansion that occupies the site where many, many years ago stood the castle of the Benstedes.

The Benstedes of Bennington were many; two of them, a knight and a lady, lie stretched in effigy upon their altar tombs in the neighbouring church. I will trouble my head about none of them save the most illustrious, Sir John de Benstede. He lived in days when but little grass grew beneath men's feet, and played a conspicuous part in the politics of his country. I have never found any mention of his birth: he died about 1323. He went with Edward I. into Flanders, and was Keeper of the Great Seal at the time. Then we find him for two years Chancellor of Longshanks' Exchequer, a post which he relinquished in 1307, in favour of John de Sandale. Then he became Keeper of the Wardrobe, and after that a Justice of the Common Pleas. In those days the Scot was often adventurous as he was canny, and had a remarkable liking for an occasional raid into English territory, which was of course such conduct as could not be tolerated by us law-abiding Englishmen. So King Edward sent Sir John into Northumberland, there to gather together the knights and men-at-arms and free lances, and to covenant with them concerning the better defence of the border. On another occasion Sir John started upon a journey to the Pope, with orders to interview that potentate touching the affairs of Scotland. He got no further than Dover when he was recalled, and was soon afterwards sent among those envoys who treated for peace with Robert Bruce. He once went to Rome with

the Bishop of Hereford, to entreat the Pope to canonise that Bishop's predecessor, Thomas Cantilupe. I do not know whether the Pope consented, and common honesty compels me to confess that I am not anxious in the matter. It is more to the point that in 1308 Sir John obtained from King Edward permission to hold two markets and one fair annually on his manor of Bennington. Of his wives, Isabella and Petronella, we know nothing; one of his descendants, Sir William de Benstede, who died in 1485, was the last squire of the race.

There is often a difference between things which suffice for one's own satisfaction and things which are sufficient for the satisfaction of other people. Dr. Johnson once sat down to a dinner which was good enough in its way, but he afterwards complained that it was "not a dinner to *ask* a man to." I was reminded of this anecdote just now at the village of Aston, which is a small, quiet village between Bennington and Knebworth Station, a village where a man of large leisure and studious habits might pass a month to his soul's profit, but which contains little enough which a wandering penman may set down for the edification of readers. The villagers probably supposed that I had lost my way; in several cases my reappearance before their doorways for the third time led to the muster of the entire family outside of the homestead. Finding myself regarded in a steadfast manner which was somewhat disconcerting, and being by nature of a retiring disposition, I have followed the example of the sinner in olden times and have sought sanctuary in the parish church. It is an Early English structure, largely restored, with very few monuments or brasses. There is, however, one fine old brass in the nave, immediately before the chancel steps, bearing an inscription of some interest: "*Here lyeth buried the bodye of John Kent late servant to Kings Edwarde the sixt Queene Marye and Queene Elizabeth who married Mary ye daughter of Thomas Saunders*

and had issue by her V sonnes and V daughters whiche John deceased the fourth day of August in the yeare of our Lord God 1592 *Ætatis suæ* 72." Less than a mile from the church is Aston Bury, where I meet a shooting party returning with their spoils—no contemptible bag—in company with several fine dogs and the village policeman. The Manor House at Aston Bury should on no account be missed by



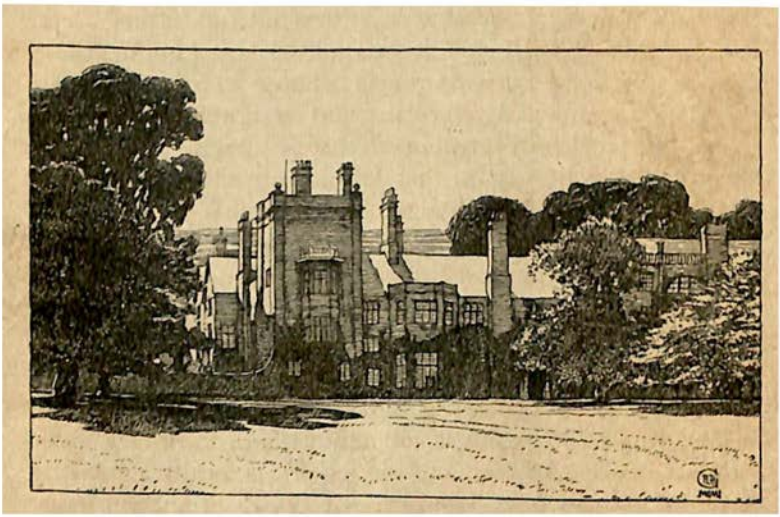
Wood Hall Park, Watton.

folk exploring the district. It is a fine 16th century house, with tall and twisted chimneys, staircases which might grace a palace, and an upper room which stretches the whole breadth of the building. It formerly belonged to the Botelers, a family owning property at Wood Hall Park, Watton, about five miles from Aston Bury, and whose name frequently figures on monuments in Hertfordshire churches and churchyards.

Odo, Bishop of Bayeux, was lord of the manor of *Eston* in the days when he owned the manor of Kimpton, and many another goodly property in Hertfordshire. From Odo to the Botelers of Wood Hall, Watton, is a long step; but it may be followed in a few words and is not without interest. When the Conqueror returned into Normandy to quell the rebellion that had arisen soon after he turned his back, he left the care of England to two Wardens. One of those Wardens was Odo. In the absence of the cat it was only natural that the mice should play, and presently Odo, casting longing eyes upon the Pontificate, purchased a palace in the Eternal City and set out thither with all the pomp and circumstance of a wealthy and powerful bishop, laden with treasure and attended by a princely retinue. The party reached the Isle of Wight, and no doubt already gloated over that magnificence which was to be theirs. But a lion lay in their path. William came suddenly upon the absconding Warden, seized him, as one narrator says, "with his own hands," despoiled him of that treasure which had been largely stolen from churches, and sent him as a prisoner to Rouen. The Manor of Aston then reverted to the crown, and in the days of Henry I., Adelia, the King's wife, gave manor, church and appurtenances to the abbot and monks of Reading, together with "Soc, Sac, Thol, Them, Infangthaf" and other liberties. It was the Dissolution that placed the property at the disposal of the Crown, and eventually in the hands of the Botelers.

The scenery through which I have passed during my rambles from Baldock to Aston is perhaps more truly typical of the county than any to be seen elsewhere in Hertfordshire. The county has never lacked admirers. I have quoted from several writers already; it would be easy to quote the praises of many more. Only a few days back a cutting from a London weekly was sent to me by a friend—a cutting which embodies a great deal in a very few words. Hertfordshire, says the writer of the paragraph in question, "is one of the glories of rural Eng-

land. It yields to no other portion of our isle in the suave charms of its woodland scenery, its graceful valleys, verdant commons and quaint old houses. In no sense a 'show' county, it is always satisfying to the lover of natural beauty, while even on its Middlesex border, within easy distance of the great city, it offers solitude almost as supreme as that of Devonshire or Derbyshire." It is a county of few waste places, "in luxuriance it is not surpassed by any county in England." Its valleys are covered over with corn; in 1879 it contained nearly 60,000 acres of wheat and 50,000 of barley, a very large acreage in proportion to its size. Its pastures are clothed with flocks, although, owing to the large tracks of land laid out as private grounds, those flocks are fewer in number than might be supposed, and are rather below the average for all England. And, reader, to borrow from scriptural phraseology for a finish, I think it probable that had you accompanied me from village to village during my wanderings in this part of the county you would have more than once recalled to mind those words of the Psalmist, "the little hills rejoice on every side."



CHAPTER XIII

BENGEO, STANDON, BRAUGHING, ASPENDEN, BUNTINGFORD

I LEAVE Hertford this morning for the second time by the road that passes the Quakers' Burial Ground; thence, turning to the right, I traverse the pine-shaded pathway near the river Lea. The trees are white with hoar frost; the air is keen; the road rings beneath my feet. The mist hangs over the river and the lower meadows; but is slowly dispersing as the sun gains strength. The river here is deeper and wider than the Beane; but for all that it is but a tiny water-way, where nothing larger than a shallop could float. Presently, on turning to the left, I reach the small church—one of the oldest in the county—dedicated to St. Leonard. It is believed to have been built in the days of the early Normans and is probably 800 years old. I have already mentioned that it is one of the two churches in Hertfordshire that boast an apsidal chancel, the other being at Great Wymondley, and this singularity of structure together with the wooden bell-cote that does duty for a tower, gives this ancient church an appearance of quaintness not readily forgotten. It was restored by the liberal owners of Bengeo Hall; but is now seldom used for divine service, the newer and more stately church of the Holy Trinity standing on the summit of a neighbouring hill. Nor is the modern building lacking in interest, except to the antiquarian; for it is a noble structure of Kentish Rag, and the reredos is locally famous for its terra-cotta panels by Tinworth. To Bengeo, in 1656, came

Sir Richard Fanshawe after his imprisonment at the hands of the Roundheads, and stayed here for awhile, for the benefit of his health. Lady Fanshawe, in her "Memoirs" tells us that her husband "procured leave to go in September to Bengy, in Hertfordshire, to a little house lent us by my brother Fanshawe." He could hardly have chosen a more peaceful or picturesque retreat.

Bullfinches, in beautiful plumage, are busy among the berries by the wayside, as I go on my way towards the Reformatory. Upon my right, scarcely visible above the mists that yet linger in the valley, stands the noble Italian house of Ware Park, "bosomed high in tufted trees." There are even more lapwings in the fields than I saw near Newnham; flocks of linnets are flying from place to place; thrushes, solitary and disconsolate, linger in the frozen ditches. Presently I come within sight of the Rib, a narrow stream flowing from the neighbourhood of Buntingford; then to Wades Mill, a village on the old North Road.

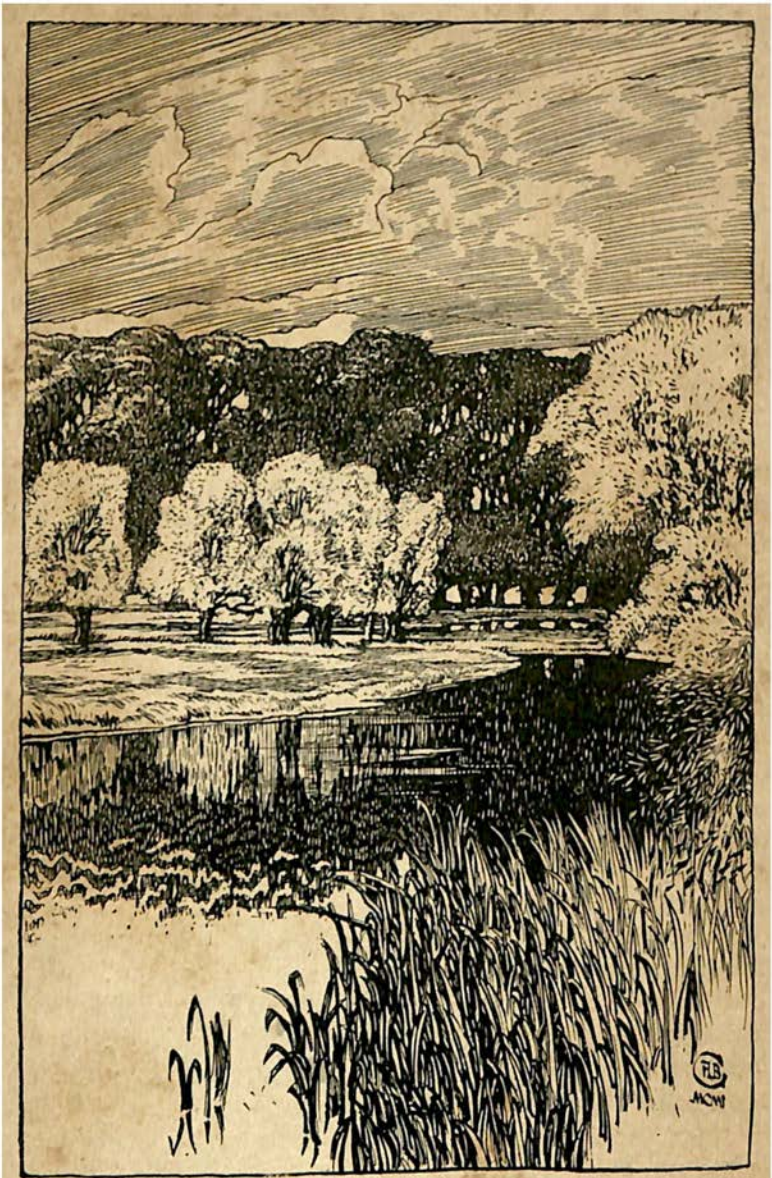
On the western side of the old North Road, as you go up the hill towards High Cross, there stands a plain stone monument. The words upon that monument are few; but they record the origin of one of the most momentous struggles in the world's history. "On the spot where stands this monument, in the month of June 1785, Thomas Clarkson resolved to devote his life to bringing about the abolition of the Slave Trade." Were I to pause at every spot where a good resolution was once formed I might pause, God knows, in every village street; but it is another matter to contemplate the spot where Clarkson formed a resolve which was destined to gather strength with his years, to gain adherents among noble men, and to shake the world. I can think of no moment in our nation's recent history fraught with such weighty issues as this, unless indeed, it be the moment when Bright and Cobden declared that they would never rest until the Corn Laws were repealed. This great yearning by the wayside went out to the uttermost parts

of the earth. This is not the place to recall the stages in the great struggle for the emancipation of the slave; but I love to think that so great a chapter in the world's history had its beginning in Hertfordshire, and that the true patriot who stood here on that early summer's day more than a century ago was one whose love for man knew no narrow insular boundaries and who realised that his scheme was but a part in the emancipation of a world too often bound in the thraldom of petty weaknesses.

> "He is a free man whom the truth makes free,
> And all are slaves beside."

The words are those of a Hertfordshire poet.

I hardly know whether to say anything about that hero of my youth—Dick Turpin. So many people have said something about him before me that I fear to repeat at length so old and well worn a story; but there is no reason why I should pass over the famous ride to York wholly without comment. Mr. Outram Tristram supposes that the magnanimous highwayman, after leaving Ware, must have passed, on the back of his bonny Black Bess, through Wade's Mill, Puckeridge and Buntingford, and may I not suppose so too? What is to be gained by tramping on the King's highway in such frosty weather unless it be the memory that old Pepys went this way before me and that Turpin galloped up the hill towards High Cross, rattled merrily through Collier's End, clattered along the narrow street of Puckeridge, rounded the dangerous twist near the *Old George Inn*, and raced for dear life towards Royston, with three exasperated limbs of the law panting in his wake? Ainsworth has told Dick's story, once for all, and has described how, having leaped over a man in a donkey cart at Edmonton, he paused at a publichouse near Ware and drank a tankard of ale with becoming nonchalance. Presently his pursuers came into sight, perspiring and blaspheming, but Turpin regained his saddle and was off again like the wind. He had given Black Bess



Water Meadows at Puckeridge.

more ale than he drank himself and had given the inn-keeper a guinea into the bargain, so it was only natural that mine host should prove unable to accommodate Mr. Paterson and his two comrades with a change of horses. But there, the pace is too fast for me; I cannot follow the pursued and the pursuers into "the merry county of Huntingdon," much as I could wish to see them climb the hill into Godmanchester, skirt the banks of the Ouse, and listen, sixty miles from town, to the tolling of the eleventh hour from the spire of St. Mary's Church. You tell me this has all been proved a myth. Of course it has. Do you know of any story, romantic and picturesque, from the Noachian Deluge to the Thundering Legion, that has escaped a mauling from prosaic hands? Alas! even science seems but a quicksand of conjecture and, as Mr. Andrew Lang has said, we shall soon cease to believe in anything scientific. Criticise what you will, but leave me my heroes.

Men who lived adventurous lives and died sudden deaths were once the owners of the Manor of Standon, a village close to Puckeridge. The railroad now runs near the river Rib; a large warehouse stands beside the station, and I will answer for it that any of those jolly, land-grabbing old rascals who once held the manor would not recognise their property if they came to life again. In the days of the Conqueror that property was owned by Lady Rothais, daughter of Walter Giffard, Earl of Buckingham. Alas! rich landladies are not exempt from sorrow. Her husband, Richard, the son of Earl Geslebert, was lord of all Cardiganshire. One day as he was marching through the woods towards Abergavenny, he ran foul of Jorweth, who lay in wait for him, and was there slain. I cannot say whether the Lady Rothais was here at Standon when she heard of her lord's death, but I have read that presently, her husband having been buried at St. Neots, she became the wife of Eudo Dapifer, that worthy warrior who built Colchester Castle. Then Standon fell to the portion of her son, then to her son's son, Richard de Clare, first Earl of

Hertford. Once more Wales proved a fatal land to a Standon lord; for Richard went here and there taking castles at the sword's point, and it was by the sword of the Welshman he perished. Then, after I forget what lapse of time, Standon was owned by Gilbert de Clare, "first joint Earl of Gloucester and Hertford," who fought stoutly against King John, was taken prisoner on the field of Lincoln and kept in Gloucester Castle. And was there not another Richard de Clare who, as lord of the manor of Standon, made his ownership manifest by seizing the monopoly of the fishing rights, and made money by selling to the villagers the fish taken in their own river? And ought I to ignore Lionel Duke of Clarence, third son of Edward III., who obtained a charter for a market to be held here every Friday? Where are they all? "Where's he that died o' Wednesday?" Lady Rothais was buried beside Eudo Dapifer beneath what was once the monastery of St. John at Colchester; Gilbert de Clare sleeps in Tewkesbury Abbey, his widow died at Berkhampstead, and was buried at Beaulieu; Richard their son, who grabbed the fishing rights, is supposed to have been poisoned whilst eating with Peter de Savoy, and lies with his father at Tewkesbury; Lionel Duke of Clarence died "in the house of the Duke of Milain in the city of Alba," and was buried in the church of the Augustinian Friars at Clare. They are all gone; almost forgotten; for they are never thought of save by some collegiate fellow with his nose in a folio, or some vagabond rambler who, as he wanders from village to village, has sometimes little enough to think about unless he remembers those worthies who once owned the land upon which he treads.

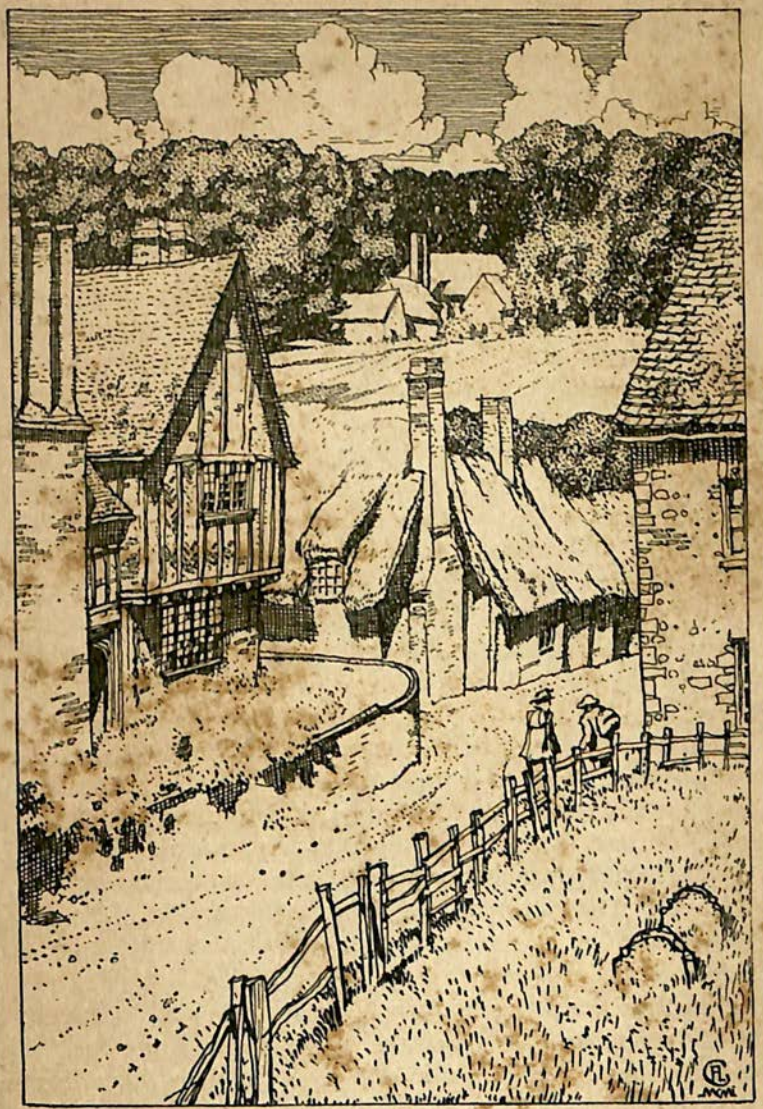
I cannot retrace my steps to Puckeridge without thinking of one who was a notable figure in the reigns of Henry VIII., Edward VI., Mary and Elizabeth—Sir Ralph Sadleir. He lived much at the Manor House of Standon Lordship, which was visited by James I. In the parish church, on the south side of the chancel, is the splendid monument to the memory

of Sir Ralph Sadleir. The good old knight lies stretched in effigy above the reliefs of his sons and daughters. He was worthy of this witness to his fame; for he was a shrewd diplomatist, a brave warrior and an able writer. Like a later statesman, he attempted many things, and usually succeeded in the end. He was born at Hackney in 1507, and spent some of his earlier years in the household of Thomas Cromwell. When, in 1537, the Queen Dowager Margaret was airing her grievances against the Scots, and the King of Scotland was cultivating a suspicious friendship with France, Sadleir was sent beyond the Tweed to inquire into both these matters. Such a mission required the delicacy of a wooer and the tact of a diplomatist and these were qualities conspicuous in his character. We find him presently at Rouen, then again in Scotland, whither he was sent to use his influence with James to the detriment of a most meddlesome man—Cardinal Beaton. After the death of James, Sadleir resided in Edinburgh, where he continued to watch the Cardinal. The bed of a diplomatist is not always strewn with roses, and Sadleir was to learn much of the perils that beset such as walk in high places. Henry VIII. suspected that certain merchant vessels were bound for France and victualled for the foreigner's relief. The vessels were detained; their owners, very naturally, were greatly incensed at the delay. The house of the ambassador was surrounded by angry Scots, who threatened his life unless the vessels were freed, and he narrowly escaped death from a musket ball. He sought shelter in Tantallon Castle, and was eventually escorted into England by Sir Geo. Douglas. When the Earl of Hertford led his raiders against the Scots, Ralph Sadleir rode with him; indeed, he was seldom free from the cares of Scottish politics and quarrels, and here, in the church of Standon, is preserved "the standard pole of the Royal banner of Scotland" as a memento of that day when he rallied the English horse on the battle field of Pinkie. Our cavalry had been discouraged and broken by the stalwart Scottish

spearmen, but the courage and tact of Sadleir proved more than equal to the occasion ; the lost ground was regained, and the hero of the day was made a knight banneret. When Mary became Queen the knight retired to his home at Standon and seems to have stayed here through her brief reign. Prudence dictated such a course, for Sir Ralph was a pronounced Protestant and could hardly have been much in the company of Mary without giving offence. But when the Queen died Sir Ralph came forward again to share the burdens of the day, and went to Hatfield, where he assisted the arrangements for Elizabeth's entry into London. Readers of Mr. Lang's *Mystery of Mary Stuart* may remember that it was Sir Ralph Sadleir who wrote to Cecil concerning the contents of the famous Casket Letters, and arrested the Duke of Norfolk on a charge of complicity in the intrigues of Mary Stuart. Sir Ralph died on 30th May, 1587. Edward Sadleir of Temple Dinsley was his second son.

The church of St. Mary at Standon is so old a structure that it is believed to still retain some Saxon foundations. The larger part of the building is, however, Decorated, with an Early English chancel arch of great beauty. "The floors of both nave and chancel slope perceptibly upwards from the west end to the altar, the slope being about an inch and a half in every seven feet." There is a crypt beneath the chancel, which is approached by eight steps from the nave and there are a further five steps to the altar, an arrangement which imparts a very singular appearance to the whole church. The stone font has an octagonal bowl and dates from Norman times.

Before making my way to Buntingford, I leave the old North Road at the *White Hart* in Puckeridge, and walk as far as to Braughing, a village on the main road to Cambridge. A footpath leads from the road to the river Quin near its junction with the Rib. As I go down that footpath, the village rises before me on the opposite hillside, the church standing in



Braughing.

the centre. In the summer the many trees that mark the river's course almost hide the village from sight, but now, when those trees are bare, the cottages—there are but few large houses in Braughing—can be seen plainly enough through a network of twigs. I linger on the little bridge to watch the Quin creep sluggishly beneath, and to give due heed to the doings of a pair of wagtails who are wading in the ooze. How elusive, how difficult to express in words, is the charm of the river side, even where that river is little more than a brook which "idles its sluggish life away in lazy liberty, without turning a solitary spindle, or affording even water power enough to grind the corn that grows upon its banks." Nor is the scene less picturesque as I go up the hill, pass the church, and come to the village pump and the *Axe and Compasses*. Here are cottages with roofs of mossy thatch, tiny amorphous homes whose walls are perilously awry; yet they stand year after year in defiance of the laws of gravitation, surviving relics of many a bygone age. We make much ado about succeeding generations of mankind, busying ourselves with their average duration, and I sometimes wonder what is the average age of an English cottage. The Saxons were here a thousand years ago and called this place the town of Brooking. Who shall say how many cottages have stood on any one spot since? Some cottages are very much older than is supposed, and it may be that some of these are but the fourth or fifth successors of those which stood on or near the same site when Stephen granted a market to the town of *Brachinges*, decreeing at the same time that no man should hinder the going out or the coming in of the men of Brachinges under a penalty of ten pounds. Good old days! Days when by securing the good graces of a monarch men might do as they listed with impunity. A Roman sarcophagus was once discovered near Braughing, and many Roman coins have been found in the neighbourhood. Moreover, archæologists can trace the remains of a vallum and fosse; and these facts have

given rise to a deeply rooted opinion that Braughing was once a Roman station—the *Ad Fines* of the historians.

Having returned to Puckeridge I decide to leave Great and Little Munden unvisited, for time is flying and I have some distance to go before dark; so I follow once again the trend of this old North Road, the Roman Ermine Street, coming presently to a pretty stretch of country and to the bridge over the Rib. Through this country a single line of railroad runs to Buntingford, the terminus of the branch. On my right is a long depression, almost worthy the name of valley, where a tangle of fir and larch and pine is haunted by clamorous rooks. There is but little water in the Rib just now and the cottagers are fearing a serious drought, but there is stream sufficient to bubble and brawl and blab as it tumbles over the old brick dam near the bridge. Far up the hill there stands a dismantled windmill, its sails almost rotted or blown away—a sorry relic—only waiting for that stormy night or day which shall make away with it for ever. On my left lies the village of Westmill, two miles from Braughing, said to owe its name to the three mills that stood here beside the Rib in the days of the great Survey. Those mills were collectively valued at 21*s.* 8*d.*, the whole *Vill*, including pannage for a hundred hogs, ploughed meadows and pasture for cattle, being valued at £17. From the meadow above the village, a meadow honeycombed by innumerable rabbits, I can look down over Westmill, which to-day is but a cluster of cottages around an old church, looking, I doubt not, much as it looked in the days of Nathaniel Salmon. Salmon, once curate here at Westmill, deserves a passing word. A man of versatile gifts and strong opinions, he took the oath of allegiance to King William III., but strongly refused to acknowledge that monarch's successor. He abandoned his clerical labours and struggled to earn an honest living as a medical practitioner at St. Ives and at Bishop's Stortford. That he was no mere victim of passing whims may be inferred from the fact that he was offered a

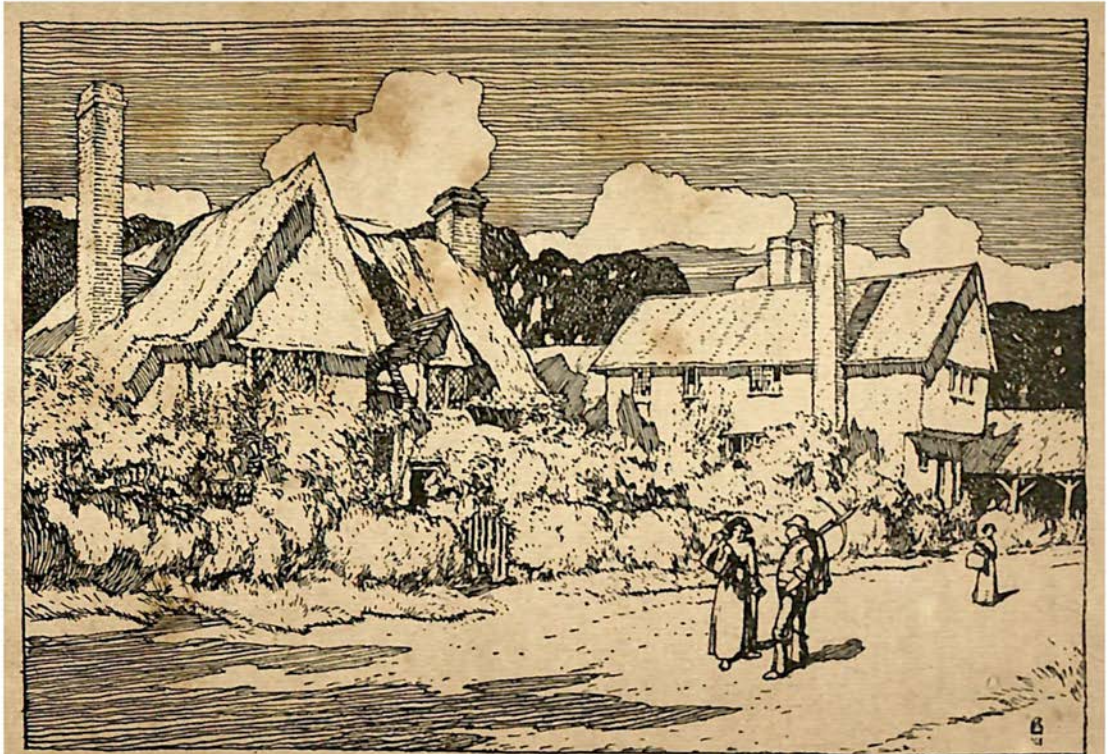
living in Suffolk, worth about £140 a year, but allowed another to fill the vacancy rather than trifle with the dictates of conscience. After this he went to London to write for the publishers, and the old story of such adventurers was his also. He was the author of a *History of Hertfordshire* which was published in 1728; and of a *History of Essex*, which, bulky as it is, was not complete when he died. Students interested in his life and opinions may turn to his *Lives of the English Bishops from the Restoration to the Revolution*, in which they will find that Salmon was a good hater who recorded his dislike for Burnet in no measured language.

At Westmill, as at Braughing, coins and pottery have been found bearing the hall-marks of the ubiquitous Roman and have given rise to antiquarian conjectures worthy of Monkbarns. I will let those conjectures severely alone, or I may say something detrimental to the superior claims of Braughing and thus find myself in sad disgrace. The men of Westmill had already forgotten the Roman and all his ways when the Conqueror gave Westmele to Robert de Olgi, a brave Norman who had fought for him to some purpose at Hastings. That must have been a memorable gathering many years later, when John le Moyne, "for the health of his soul and the souls of his ancestors," gave the entire rental and tithe of Westmill to Gilbert the Prior, in the presence of John de Falcarius, Robert de Angella, Ralph Idulph, Lawrence de Sancto Michaele and John Board, Knights. Westmill, indeed, must have known as many owners as Ware; for Edward III. gave the manor, in "free and perpetual alms," to the abbey of St. Mary de Graces, and from the abbey it passed to Sir Thomas Audley, Knight Chancellor of England, who held it in fealty from the King, with a yearly rent of £3 4*s.* due at the feast of St. Michael the Archangel. Then the property fell to Lord Thomas Howard, then to one John Brogram, Esq., and afterwards to I know not how many more. The villagers of Westmill should be

excellent judges of rabbits and mushrooms; for their practical knowledge of both is unquestionably great.

Late in the evening I reach Aspenden. It is an irregularly built village, where picturesque cottages elbow each other in the gathering gloom—so quaint, so diverse, so often repaired that we can hardly guess their approximate age. In the church near by, beneath a canopied tomb, lies Sir Robert Clifford—he has lain here for nearly four hundred years and his wife lies by his side. Son of an illustrious line, and "Knight to the body" to Henry VII., he contrived to bring disgrace upon his name, for it has come down to us linked with the name of Perkin Warbeck. How far he was actually implicated in the schemes of that adventurer I am not prepared to say, and it matters little enough now. As I pass down the village street I find myself thinking of other men who were once here, and who were widely known and honoured in their several spheres. It was at Aspenden that Mrs. Macaulay nursed the precocious Tom through a severe illness, and readers may remember how, in later life, he wrote to that mother, "There is nothing I remember with such pleasure as the time when you nursed me at Aspenden."

If any man should say that he has never heard of John Janeway, I can but reply, "Sir, the loss is yours." Was not his life written by his brother James, prefaced by the great Robert Hall, and commended in an introductory address to the Christian reader by Richard Baxter? Did not Sam Borsett, some time Fellow of King's College, Cambridge, publish abroad his testimony to the beauty of John Janeway's character, and did not the Rev. Marmaduke Tennant, minister of Therfield, a village six miles north from Aspenden, add his "testimony" thereto? Janeway was so spiritually minded as almost to deserve the name of mystic; we may class him with Joseph Alleine and David Brainerd. He was born at Lilley in 1633, but frail, erring mortal that I am, I forgot all about him when

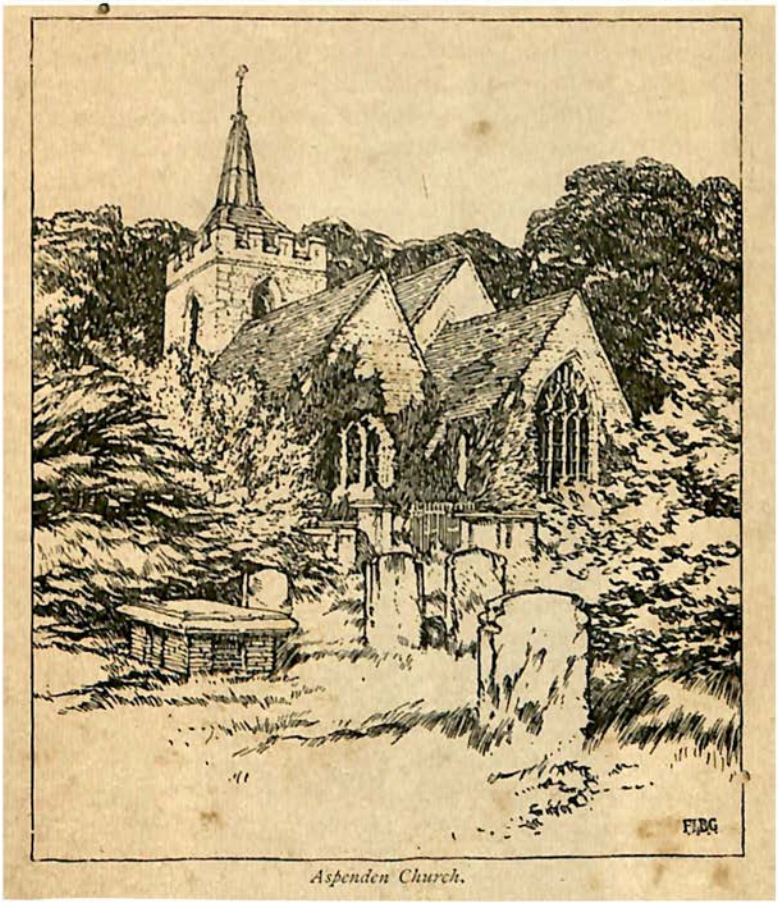


At Aspenden.

I was near that village. His parents removed to Aspenden when he was about twelve years old, at which time we are assured he was proficient in Greek and Latin, in Hebrew and arithmetic. He went to Eton, and from thence to Oxford, where he attained extraordinary skill in mathematics under Dr. Seth Ward, of whom more anon. He became a Fellow of King's College, Cambridge, and presently, moved by the exhortation of pious men and the perusal of Baxter's *Saint's Everlasting Rest*, he began to seek religious rather than scholastic attainments. He entered the house of a Dr. Cox as tutor to the doctor's son, but the hand of death was already upon him. His brother has told us that he was soon obliged to retire to his mother's house at Aspenden; "but hard study, frequent and earnest prayers, and long and intense meditations, had so ruinated this frail tabernacle that it could not be fully repaired, yet, by God's blessing upon care, and art, it was under-propped for some time." He might perhaps have recovered, lived a long life of usefulness and left behind him a great reputation, had not some of his friends stimulated his religious excitement beyond the strength of so feeble a frame. It is a grave question whether the influence of Newton was not on the whole detrimental to Cowper; and we can easily understand how Janeway's high-strung temperament would be unduly stimulated by such advice as was sometimes poured into his ear. A Mr. Bolton, for instance, had stated that however gifted a man might be, he was, without the "life of grace," no better than "a rotten carcase, stuck over with flowers, magnified dung, gilded rottenness, golden damnation"! I will not multiply such elegant extracts. Janeway, throughout his brief life, evinced a wonderful sweetness of disposition, and by the testimony of his many friends he would certainly, with a more powerful constitution, have become a great divine. But it was not to be. He died of rapid consumption in June, 1657, in his twenty-fourth year, and a few days afterwards the Keats of Hertfordshire divinity was buried in the church of St. Faith at Kelshall.

Small, quiet, unimportant as Aspenden is, it was the birthplace of one to whom I referred just now; a man who made some stir in his day: Dr. Seth Ward. He was born in 1617 and baptised in the little church where those Cliffords lie on the 5th April. He studied at Buntingford, at Cambridge and at Oxford; he became a mathematician, a staunch churchman, a bishop. Early in life he had a hand in the compiling of that once famous work with the long title, touching the unlawfulness of the solemn League and Covenant, which the Puritans promptly burned. It was soon his turn to suffer; refusing to take the Covenant, he lost his Fellowship and returned to Aspenden. Here for a short time he taught the sons of his friend Ralph Freeman. He continued his studies, became a profound mathematician and was appointed Savilian Professor of Astronomy at Oxford. Philosophy, too, engaged his attention, and so his controversy with Hobbes did much to bring his name before men's eyes. It was in 1654 that he published his *Vindiciæ Academiarum*, in which, defending the academic system, he declared that when Hobbes published his "geometrical pieces" he would find that the University understood them only too well for their author's peace of mind. Hobbes had given out that he had squared the circle, and when his *De Corpore* appeared soon afterwards he attacked Seth Ward ("Vindex") and set himself the impossible task of attempting to establish his assumptions—or, rather, to justify their only too palpable inconclusiveness. Ward and Wallis, the geometrician, replied jointly to the *De Corpore*, and, between them, the philosopher of Malmesbury was severely handled. The Aspenden man figured next as President of Trinity College, Oxford; but his term of office was brief, for he was compelled to resign in favour of Hannibal Potter. He filled several other posts before succeeding John Gauden in the bishopric of Exeter. He was presently translated to Salisbury and became, I am sorry to say, something of a bigot. We read that his conduct towards his religious opponents waxed so intolerant that Colonel Blood was

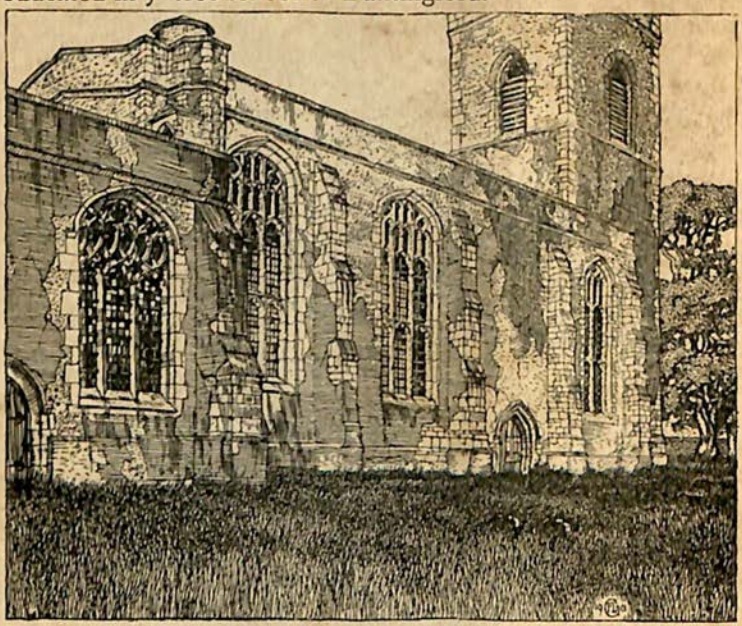
sent by the King to urge him to be less zealous against them. The earnest, strenuous, mathematical old prelate wore out his brain some time before his death. He seems not to have re-



Aspenden Church.

visited Aspenden in his later days, and, when death came at last, his cathedral was deemed the most fitting sanctuary for his body. Burnet has told us that Ward was a profound statesman but an indifferent clergyman. His name has been read in

Buntingford by many who have never seen that name in a book, for at the south end of the town stands an old building with a stone above its central doorway, bearing the words: "1684. This Hospitall was erected and endowed by Seth Ward D.D. Ld. Bp. of Salisbury and Chancellor of y^e^ most noble order of y^e^ garter he was born in yis town within y^e^ parrish of Aspden & educated in y^e^ free-school of Buntingford."



Cottered Church.

The valley of Aspenden is now a pleasant enough spot in which to dwell; a small quiet valley between gently rising hills. But according to tradition it was at one time a less eligible camping ground, for it abounded with asps, that bred in the valley in astonishing numbers, to which circumstance the village is believed to owe its name. Two miles to the west is Cottered, between Ardeley and Rushden, a village which I overlooked when at Cromer some weeks back. Cottered,

also, is said to owe its name to its situation, for the Saxons called it Coldridge, by reason of the bare, bleak ridge upon which it stood. Here I can notice but two features of interest. The church, restored a few years back, is chiefly Perpendicular, with a western tower surmounted by a lofty spire. Chauncy, writing nearly 200 years ago, says, "'Tis dedicated to the Honour of St. John Baptist, on which Feast a Wake is kept in the Town at this day. These Wakes in Parishes were ordained by a Law made in the time of Edward (the Confessor) to be kept on the Feast of the Saint to whom the Church is dedicated; and that he which shall come to celebrate the same, shall be secure in going, staying, and returning home." Near by, the fine old farmhouse known as Cottered Lordship is perhaps the oldest dwelling-house in Hertfordshire. Like almost all old edifices, some portions of it are more ancient than others; I am assured, for instance, that the front door can hardly be later than 1480!

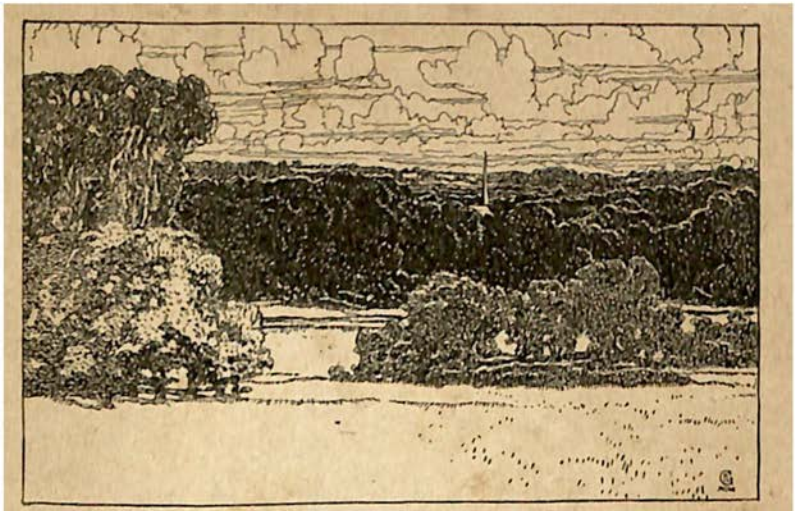
Were I to continue my way westward for a couple of miles I should cross the road where I walked with the strolling musician near Rushden, the man with the brass whistle. So I turn towards Aspenden once again, and pass through the village late at night. It is a night of perfect stillness; the whole heavens are spangled with lustrous stars; the air, despite the lateness of the year, seems fragrant with some unknown sweetness, as the air of the open country often is. That burden of this unintelligible world of which Wordsworth speaks is doubtless at times a very real one; but if ever its mysteries are in part revealed it is when we are in closest touch with Mother Earth and are content to forget all policies and creeds in the quiet beauty of night, whether in the valley or upon the hillside. And because in silent walks on starlit ways lies such perfect refreshment of soul, I am in no haste to enter Buntingford; so I loiter in Aspenden as though it were my duty to stand sentry over the village, hearing little saving an occasional hum of voices when a cottage door is suddenly opened, or the

small-talk of the sparrows in their resting places, who chatter in their sleep. At an hour which I do not choose to record I pass the railway station, and the *Adam and Eve*, and enter the long, straight street of Buntingford.

Buntingford, although described as an old agricultural town, is much less ancient than the villages which I have recently visited. One of the very earliest references to the town tells us that Edward III. granted to "Elizabeth de Burgo" one market each week and one fair each year. The same king subsequently granted to the town other privileges, amongst which was the right to hold a market in the highway of the *vill* on every Saturday. Henry VIII., when busily scattering his liberalities among his favourites, gave to the people of Buntingford his gracious permission to hold a market "in the High Street" every Monday. And what a long, quaint thoroughfare that High Street is even to-day! It looks as though from time to time a few amateur architects had done their best to add to the variety of structure that lined its length on either side. Here, close to the old bridge at the southern end of the town, stands the renovated chapel-of-ease to the church of St. Bartholomew at Layston, originally completed in 1626 at the instigation of Alexander Strange, vicar of Layston. This Strange was born in London, studied at Peterhouse College, Cambridge, and was a Prebendary at St. Paul's. His church at Layston was so far from Buntingford that many folks were unable to attend divine service, so the good vicar, anxious that all his flock should be indeed "inexcusable," set earnestly to work and begged money to erect this building, very unecclesiastical in appearance, especially since the last restoration. He collected the sum of £418 13*s.* 8*d.*, and I am pleased to say that the chapel cost him 3*s.* 7*d.* less than he received.

Continuing my way up the flagged, cobbled, and very uneven street, I notice the covered well erected to commemorate the Jubilee of Queen Victoria; a curious looking clock tower surmounted by a vane, projecting above a lofty archway; and doors

and doorways of every design and size. I suppose it is often a matter for wonder how so many inns contrive to pay their way —if indeed they do so. At Buntingford are several large and comfortable hostelries, besides many of meaner appearance; and yet the town itself contains less people than the village of Wheathampstead. It must be the cyclist who takes the place of that once more numerous race, the farmer and the farmer's man, and thus enables the country publican still to turn an honest penny despite a decreasing population and declining industries. Those testy old fogies who shake their heads over the morning paper and a glass of ale seem to be fewer, even in these towns on the great high roads, than in the days of our childhood. And what has become of those yokels whom we were delighted to watch as they passed along the road with a calf in a cart, or lazily trudged in the wake of a score of young porkers, stinging their fat quarters every now and again with a resounding lash? Or that barrel on wheels, the farmyard water-cart: how is it that I may now wander about the country all day without seeing one of them drawn up at the village pond? Such questions occur at every turn to-day, for there appears to be no business in Buntingford, or any travellers to take the place of those who bowled along this road in the coaching days. But perhaps my visit is ill-timed and on some future occasion I may learn that Buntingford is still a place where men meet to drive bargains, devour sirloins, drink ale by the quart, and discuss the movements of the King.



Over Great Hadham.

CHAPTER XIV

LAYSTON, WYDDIAL, ANSTEY, THE PELHAMS, THE HADHAMS

As I set out upon this, the penultimate journey of my wanderings in Hertfordshire, I am sensible that I am about to explore a portion of the county which might fail to evoke enthusiasm in many breasts. For the historian of large issues or bloody encounters has seldom found occasion to say much concerning the land that lies between Royston, Buntingford, and Bishop's Stortford, an undulating country crossed by a few small streams, dotted here and there by an old windmill, a far older church, or a lordly mansion that speaks eloquently of opulence and ease. On the whole, the district is less wooded and more purely agricultural than some others through which I have passed, and to one who regards a finely balanced beech or oak with almost Druidic veneration, this characteristic is somewhat disappointing. Moreover, when, day after day, one visits villages whose inhabitants live very similar lives, and who take little interest in the history of their parish, one is sorely

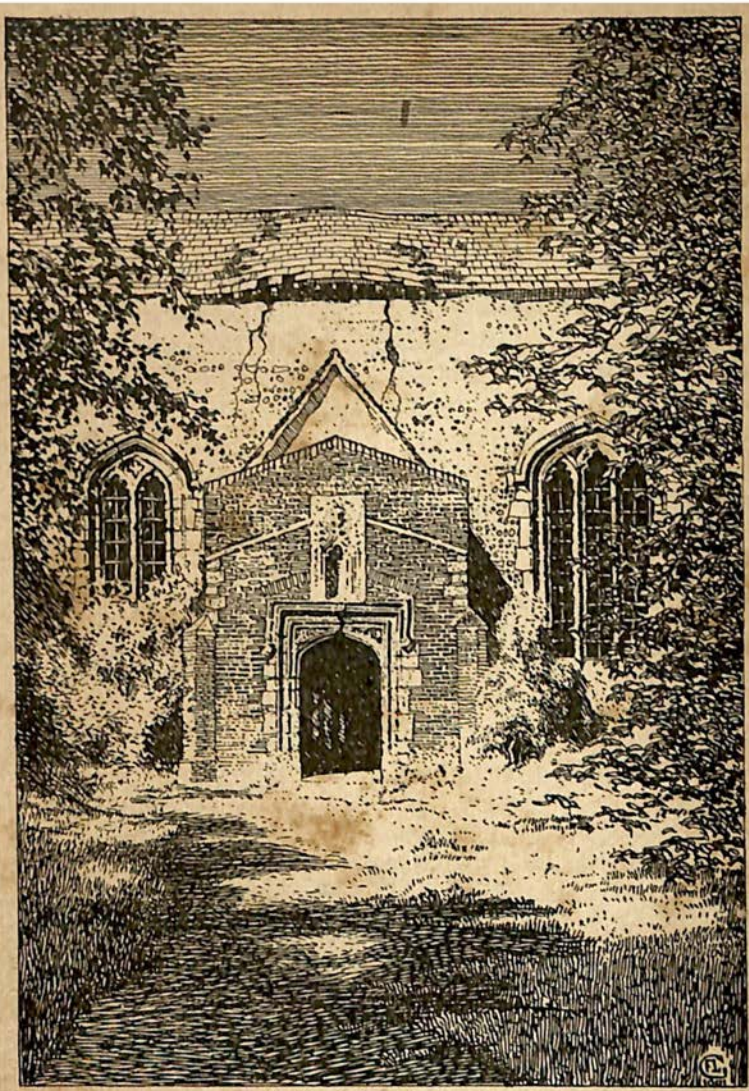
puzzled to know how to discover the hiding places of that romance or history which surely lurks in every hamlet or village, only waiting for the arrival of that wanderer who, deeming nothing beneath his notice, shall bring it forth once more into the light of common day.

I would not have it thought that the extreme east of Hertfordshire is devoid of charm; but its charms must be sought after ere they can be found. Life in the villages hereabouts—in Wyddial, in Anstey, in Meesdon, in the Hadhams and the Pelhams—is, I doubt not, dull enough in the eyes of such as love excitement rather than peace; but to such as love to look for the return of the seasons, and who discover new delights each time they walk abroad, a cottage on the Layston-Anstey Road, or between Brent and Furneaux Pelham, would furnish ideal head quarters. I have lived in such villages in this county and know that they sometimes shelter veterans of the wayside who read nature far easier than they read a book, and know more of the signs of the Zodiac than of the signs of the times. One day, perhaps, some village in this Edwintree Hundred will produce its own Thoreau, and we shall once again be shown the difference between eyes that see not and eyes that see.

I have set down these rambling reflections after leaving that eastern suburb of Buntingford which is scattered along the banks of the river Rib, and, as if to compensate for anything that may be lacking in my surroundings as I climb the hill towards Layston Church, the sky wears so strange an aspect this morning that I can but pause to scan it attentively. Last night, as I lay in a large old room near the junction of the lane from Aspenden with the old North Road, the wind blustered outside boisterously, and swept the dead leaves before it until, wearying of such foolishness, it left them in little heaps against cottage doorsteps and in the angles of walls. It seems, too, to have rushed from north to south among the clouds, for all around me, from the neighbourhood of Great Munden to

that of Barkway and from Cottered to the Pelhams, there is an appearance as though some celestial giant had drawn a comb across the heavens, and had rested not from his labours until he had covered the firmament with parallel wisps and streamers of dark grey cloud. Those wisps of cloud cover the whole sky as uniformly as scales cover a fish, and are moving slowly southward like an aërial army.

But I must leave the clouds, for here, on a lonely hillside, where no sound reaches my ear save the bleating of a few sheep, stands the ruined church of St. Bartholomew at Layston. The whole structure is still erect, and its dilapidated condition is only noticeable as I go down the avenue that leads me to the south porch. That porch is littered with masses of fallen masonry; its windows were bricked up long ago, but the bricks have in turn fallen and weeds have found a lodgment between them. The south wall of the nave is topped by tall, rank grasses, and birds have found a house for themselves in the spaces between the broken, crumbling flints and the slated roof. Many of the upper panes in the windows are smashed. This ruined church, with many graves around it, is all that remains of what once was a village; it was all that remained two centuries ago, when Chauncy wrote "The Saxons in old time erected this Vill in the fields, above a mile distant from Aspenden towards the East, where nothing now remains than the church." I suppose there was still a village here when Henry VIII. gave the manor to Sir Thomas Audley, Knight, Keeper of the Great Seal and Lord Chancellor of England. A later lord of the manor of Layston was John Crowch, who was born near Standon and became a citizen and clothworker of London, whose daughter Susan married a "Robert Walpole of Houghton in Norfolk, Esq." A descendant of John Crowch, who married a maid from Buntingford, was "out" in that memorable year 1688; for he raised a company of foot at his own expense, most of whom he lost near Dundalk.



St. Bartholomew's, Layston.

Among the many valiant Normans who placed their sword and person at the disposal of the Conqueror was one Hardwin de Scalers, whose assistance was rewarded by the manor of Widehale, now called Wyddial. I reach Wyddial after threading a narrow lane that commences at one corner of the churchyard at Layston, a lane haunted by great numbers of hedge mice, and to-day, at least, the hunting ground of wrens, tomtits and greenfinches. A few scattered cottages, with late chrysanthemums still flowering in their gardens, stand to the west of the church of St. Giles, where the Goulstons lie. The church stands within a few yards of the road from Layston to Anstey. It is a small and ancient structure, with some good windows of stained glass, and a northern chapel, where piers, arches and traceried windows are alike of brick. That chapel was built by George Canon in 1532. In his will he stated: "I bequeath my soul to Almyghtye God and to oure Blyssed Lady Sainte Marye, and to all the company of hevn, and my bodye to be buryed w^th^ the Chapell of Saynte George, in the paryshe church of Wedyall." His will was obeyed, for his relations buried him here, and placed over his grave a sufficiently sonorous epitaph: "*Hic jacet Georgius Canon, gen' nuper unius Dominorum istius villæ qui istam Insulam propriis sumptibus construxit Anno* 1532, *et Obiit* 4. *die Septembris, Anno* 26. *Illustrissimi Regis Henrici Octavi cujus animæ propitietur Deus. Amen.*" And who were the Goulstons? Well, they were evidently numerous in these parts, and like others who lie in this church were persons of dignity in their day. For here lie buried Richard Goulston, a knight, and William, his son; one Jane Goulston, whose epitaph assures us that she was a careful and indulgent mother—she bore seven sons and four daughters, so her domestic virtues were well tested—a peaceable and loving neighbour, a benevolent Mistress, and an elect daughter of the Almighty! Here, too, lies Dame Margaret, daughter of Sir Thomas Nevil, Knight and Privy Councillor in the days of Henry VIII.; she died at

fifty-five years of age, making "a most Godly end the 25th Day of December, in the year of our Lord God 1575."

There is nothing in Wyddial to detain me, so after a brief glance around the little churchyard I take to the road once more and reach the highway to Cambridge and the lane to Anstey, a village known to history from Saxon times. Just where a pathway crossed a steep hill our forefathers founded this hamlet, and named it Heanstige—the high pathway. It

Road near Wyddial.

is now a considerable village, and one of much interest in the eyes of the antiquarian. It was here that Eustace Earl of Boulogne built a castle on a raised mound; much of these ruins were standing near the moated Manor House two centuries ago; their position may still be traced in the grounds of Anstey Hall. It was a baronial stronghold in the days of King John, and was then greatly enlarged; but Camden tells us that when Henry III. came to the throne it was regarded as a nest of rebels and the King ordered that so much of it as had been

lately added in defiance of his father should be demolished. At that time the Lord of Anstey Castle was one Nicholas de Anestie, and I have somewhere read that he obeyed the King's command with an ill grace, as I should assuredly have done had I stood in his shoes. Edward III. bestowed the manor of Anstey upon his fifth son, Edmund Earl of Cambridge and upon the "heirs Males of the body of the Earl for ever"; this was the prince who, as I have already mentioned, was born at King's Langley palace in this county, and buried in the church near his birthplace. Edmund accompanied the Black Prince and John of Gaunt on that memorable day when, with four hundred large ships, the king set sail from Sandwich on board the *Grace de Dieu*, having in his large fleet 10,000 archers and 3,000 men at arms. Prayers were said in all churches for the success of the expedition; but the fates were unfavourable, the winds were contrary and the vessel eventually put back to England.

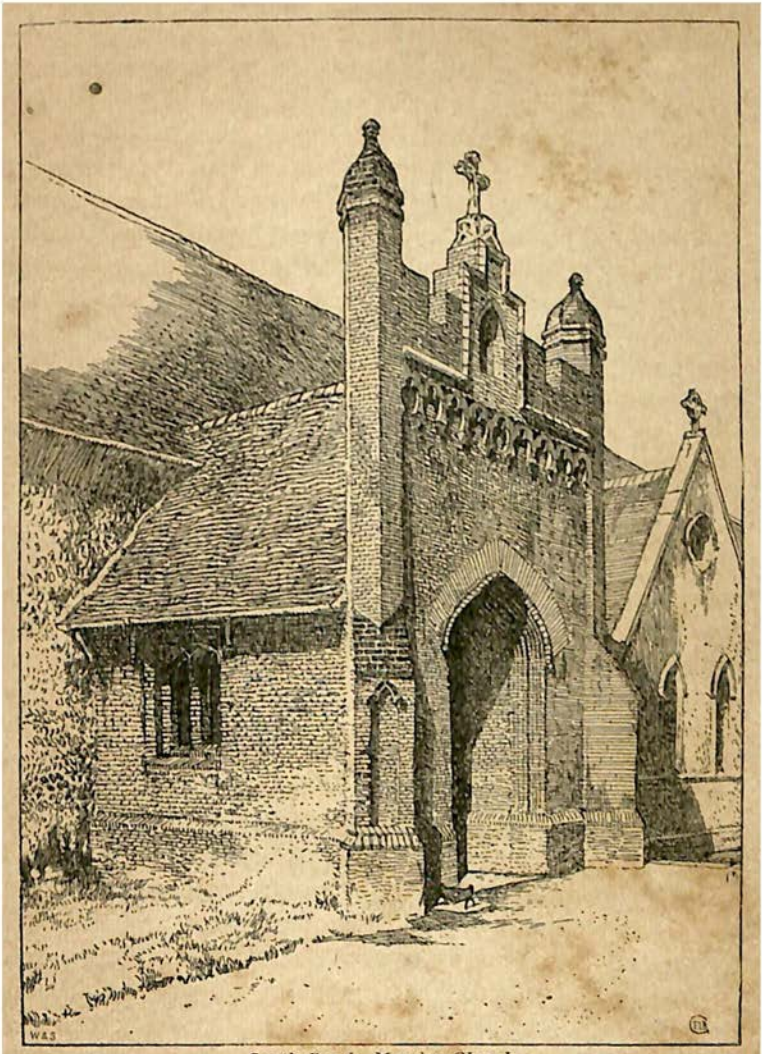
It was the Earl's son Edward who succeeded him as royal squire of Anstey, and I am sorry to say that he was a party to some very shady business. For when the Dukes of Exeter and Surrey conspired to murder King Henry IV. at Windsor Castle, it was Edward who, although he had been privy to the plot from the first, saved his own head by sacrificing his friends. He made some amends for his perfidy in the succeeding reign, for he conducted himself very courageously at Agincourt. We are told that he was a fat man, much too fat for a warrior of those days, and that he became so oppressed with the heat and rush of the battle that he was "smother'd to death." His body was brought to Fotheringay, to a church which he had there built, and was buried beneath the choir, where a large brass was placed to his memory. His exequies were "Kept with great solemnity in London, upon the 1st. day of December," shortly after the King's return from France.

The church at Anstey was once supposed to have been built in the reign of Henry III. by Richard Anestie, on a hill near

the centre of the parish, much of the material used in its construction having been taken from the castle, which was even then in ruins. But experts assure us that this cannot be true, for portions, at least, of the structure certainly date from a period when the castle was still intact. There is an old monument in the south aisle, very much the worse for its treatment at the hands of Father Time, which marks the spot where Richard Anestie is supposed to lie. The church has many attractions for students of mediæval architecture, and these have been so concisely summarised by Mr. Whitford Anderson that I quote from his words: "The church itself has a castellated appearance, due principally to a circular stair turret, pierced with crenelles, formed like a cross, as may be seen in many old castles. Anstey is one of the few cruciform churches in the county, and has a central tower resting on Norman arches. The nave arches have a singular triangular appearance owing to the centre from which they are struck being considerably below the top of the capitals. There are a number of old stalls with misereres in the chancel and the piscina or water drain is peculiar as having a side arch opening from the adjoining sedilia, or seat for the priest, thus giving him an unobstructed view of the High Altar. The font, which seems of late Norman date, has a square bowl, ornamented with mermen . . . in allusion to baptism by water. . . Before leaving this church the unique 'squints' should be noticed. The backs of the chancel piers have been cut away so as to form flying buttresses behind them, thus giving a wide opening for those in the chancel to see through." These "squints" in our old parish churches, often called hagioscopes, have been the subject of much learned controversy in Hertfordshire as elsewhere. Sometimes they are merely a narrow slit, like the inner side of an oylet, but often they are more or less arched and embellished with tracery. The controversy regarding them is chiefly as to their use, and as it is noticeable that wherever they are placed—and they are sometimes found where

you would least expect them—they afford a glimpse of the high altar, it is only natural that most architects should agree that "squints" were originally designed to enable persons in the aisles or side chapels to view that particular spot. This theory explains how the acolyte, when tolling the sanctus bell, could see the officiating priest and regulate his duty accordingly.

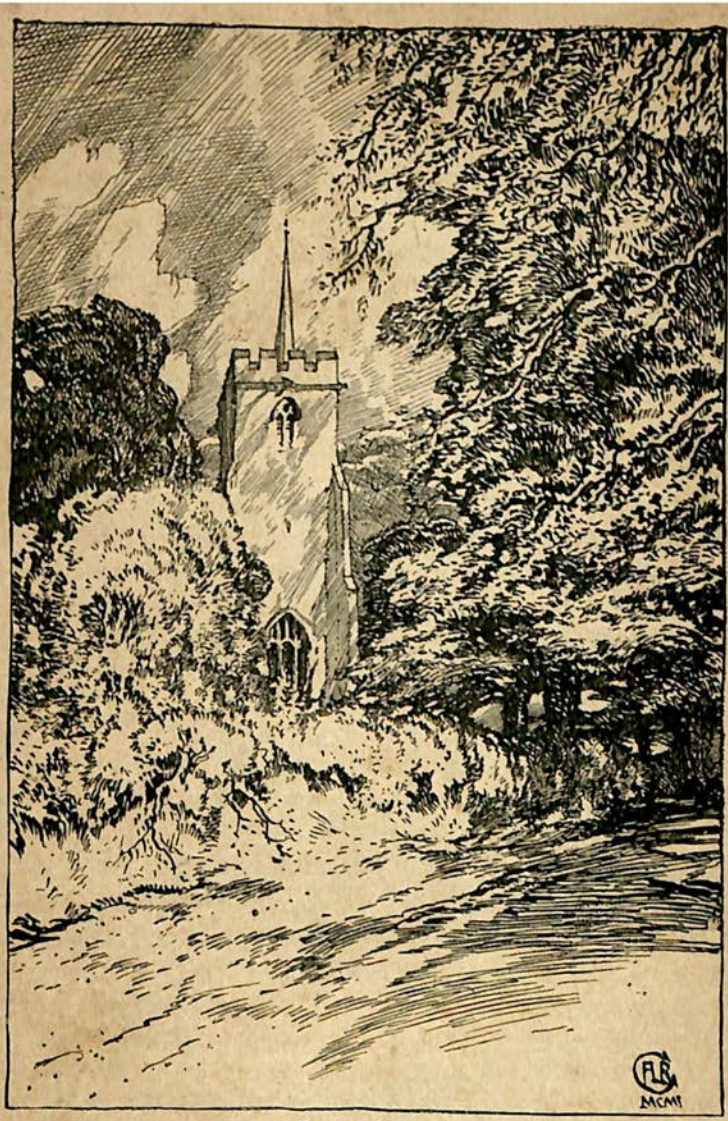
Now I have made up my mind to reach Furneaux Pelham quickly; for there is near that village a fine old house where I hope to see much of interest; and so, although I know full well that at Meesdon near Anstey there is an old church with a south porch that will figure in my book, I turn resolutely aside as though I cared for none of these things. But as I set out for Furneaux Pelham I find myself thinking of that large and comely family named Flyer, one of whom purchased the manor of Brent Pelham, a neighbouring village, Heaven knows how long ago. They were a Devonshire brood, and if any reader allows himself to suppose that they were the worse on that account I will hand him over to Mr. Norway, who will give him his deserts. The arms of Francis Flyer of Brent Pelham Hall were sable, on a chevron or, between three flying arrows, argent; crest on a wreath, a buck's head holding an arrow in the mouth, argent. I am the happy possessor of an old print whereon these arms are figured, and above is a drawing of Brent Pelham Hall. That drawing reminds me of nothing so much as of the contents of the Noah's Ark which did so much to assuage my early griefs. For there stands the mansion with a suspicious similarity between all its windows and chimney stacks; there are the out-houses, one of which is a wondrous structure defying all known laws of perspective, and another bears no small resemblance to a Japanese fire-screen. Trim gardens are surrounded by equidistant trees, having at least generic affinity with cauliflowers; before the central gateway a gentleman of Quaker aspect is talking to a tall and graceful lady, and a man with a musket over his shoulder seems to be much impressed by the eloquence of one



South Porch, Meesdon Church.

who bears a prodigious staff. Near the adjoining church two goats are refreshing themselves from a trough, whilst a man is leading a fat horse towards a blank wall. The church consists of tower and northern aisles; nave and chancel are missing, unless indeed they are hiding round the corner.

Brent Pelham is believed to have been entirely destroyed by fire in the reign of Henry I. and to owe its present name to that circumstance. The village and church are alike full of interest; outside the churchyard the old stocks still stand in excellent preservation, and are greatly venerated by local antiquarians. But the chief attraction is the church itself, for it was founded many centuries ago and historic and legendary lore have combined to impart no small interest to its story. An inventory of the furniture of this sanctuary, taken as long ago as the year 1297, contains an allusion to a *muscarium*, a kind of fan with which flies were driven from the Eucharist and from the officiating priest. A muscarium was sometimes made of an ox's tail, or of a few peacock's feathers, and such a fly flapper is mentioned in an epigram of Martial. Tradition tells us of one who encountered bigger game than flies ere he was laid to rest in the church at Brent Pelham. There, in a recess in the north wall, is an altar tomb upon which is relieved the form of an angel, carrying a human soul aloft to heaven. There, too, are the four Evangelists, under the similitude of an angel, an eagle, a lion and a bull, all winged, grouped around a cross fleuré in a dragon's mouth. This latter representation is supposed to shadow forth militant Christianity. The tomb perhaps dates from the 13th century; but as the name of its occupant was not at one time known it was necessary to supply the deficiency. That tomb had probably stood for three centuries before some wiseacre inscribed upon it a Latin verse, the date 1086 and the name of Piers Shonkes. This worthy was one who bearded dragons in their dens and slew serpents and "such small deer." One day he would a hunting go, and met with an adventure which



Brent Pelham.

perhaps he had hardly reckoned for. A mighty dragon, fearfully and wonderfully made, and a personal favourite of the Devil himself, was encountered and slain by Piers Shonkes. The Devil was very wroth at the loss of his scaly vassal and threatened to capture Shonkes when he died; so men buried the slayer of serpents in the wall itself, and as his tomb was thus neither inside nor outside of the church the Devil had no jurisdiction over his body. Said a man to me once in Hadham, "Sir, it's one of the rummiest stories I ever heard, like, that 'ere story of old Piercy Shonkey, and if I hadn't seen the place in the wall with my own eyes I wouldn't believe nothing about it." The story is very generally known, and is referred to by Weever in his *Monuments* as well as by the county historians.

The valiant Shonkes was once the owner of a moated house near the village, or so, at least, the legend runs; and I am only surprised to find that the exact site of the home of the serpent-slayer is *not* pointed out to all who visit the village of Brent Pelham. An old verse hints that the memory of Shonkes is likely to outlive that of Cadmus or St. George, although the reasons for this immortality are not very clearly set forth :—

> "Nothing of Cadmus nor St. George (those names
> Of great renown) survives them, but their fames;
> Time was so sharp set as to make no bones
> Of theirs, nor of their monumental stones.
> But Shonke one serpent kills, t'other defies,
> And in this wall as in a fortress lies."

I am sorry to say that I have never seen a picture setting forth the battle between Piers Shonkes and the dragon beloved by Satan. I have some thoughts of depicting that scene myself, in which case the old illustrations of Apollyon and Christian a-quarrelling in the Valley of the Shadow of Death will be outdone at last. One man, more fortunate than I, saw Shonkes under peculiar circumstances on a moonlight night. I do not know how many centuries have passed since the interview took place, and it is possible that the story has gained something in

its telling; but I know that Jack o' Pelham had stolen his neighbour's faggot and had almost reached home with it on his back when it suddenly trebled its weight and Jack fell heavily to the ground. As he scrambled up he saw a man with very broad shoulders standing over him, and the man's aspect was so fierce that Jack swooned right away at the sight. That man was Piers Shonkes, who must have bribed Charon to ferry him back from the farther shades.

I have been thinking once again of all this foolishness as I make my way towards Furneaux Pelham by roads that recent rains have rendered veritable quagmires. I have no respect for those topographers who would have us believe that every place they visit is one of ideal beauty; so I make a clean breast of it and confess that between Wyddial and the confines of Furneaux Pelham I have seen little to attract the eye. But presently I catch a glimpse of a fine old manor house among the trees upon my right, and rounding a corner I see the church and village in a hollow upon my left. Old Norden, that venerable topographer, who has done us highwaymen such good service, tells us that the Pelhams owe their name to the Pells and springs that rise in the neighbourhood. Whether this is true I cannot say, but there is little doubt that Furneaux Pelham took its name from the de Furneaux, a Norman family who owned all three manors—Brent, Stocking, and Furneaux Pelham—in the 13th century. It is not of the de Furneaux but of the Calverts that I think as I tread the broad pathway that leads me to Furneaux Pelham Hall, one of those grand old Elizabethan houses of red brick that have survived a dozen monarchs and look as though they will survive a dozen more. A deed dated October, 1677, records that Edward Cason sold this manor house and other properties in the same parish to Felix Calvert of Brent Pelham, Esq., an offshoot from a good and ancient family long settled in Lancashire. The mother of this Edward Cason had married, for second husband, Thomas, a son of the great Sir Robert Cecil; her first husband, Edward

Furneaux Pelham Hall.

Cason, lies in the village church, beneath the monument which she erected to his memory. Readers who know little of Hertfordshire may be interested to learn that the present owner of Furneaux Pelham Hall bears the same name as was borne by him who purchased the estate from Edward Cason more than two hundred years ago; but the county itself is already well aware of the fact.

I go back in thought beyond the days of Felix Calvert to the days when Lord Mount Eagle, in the forty-second year of Queen Bess, disposed of this manor house to Richard Mead. The Hall at that time was very much larger than now; indeed it was so spacious that Mead pulled most of it down, yet there still remained sufficient for his purposes and he converted that remnant into a pleasant home. That home was destined to become something far other than a temple of domestic peace. It shared in the vicissitudes of the Great Rebellion; for in those days the Lord of Furneaux Pelham Hall was one who drew the sword for King Charles and paid dearly for his loyalty. With his followers he struggled manfully to the bitter end, and only when those followers were all slain or dispersed did he abandon hope. His disappointment must have been great; for, like so many Cavaliers, he had probably entered the strife with a whole-hearted contempt for the soldiership of the Roundheads, which he doubtless lost only on coming to close quarters with the Ironsides. His acquaintance with the Roundheads was, unfortunately, more than battlefield encounters; for during his absence from Furneaux Pelham, his hall was ransacked by his enemies, who appear to have carried away everything of value, turned the whole family adrift, and sequestered the estate. I am glad to be able to add that when the Commonwealth was but a memory, a very unpleasant memory to the Cavalier, the faithful squire, like the merry monarch, came into his own again.

If you would see everything of interest in and around an old country home you must get the blind side of its owner.

So I crave permission to view the house and grounds, and not only obtain what I ask but have the squire himself for guide. Together we go the round of the out-houses, inspect the pigs and the poultry, saunter through the hothouses, and linger in the avenue of venerable yews, haunted by a tame nuthatch whose *tap tap* interrupts our conversation. We walk together among the espaliers, watch the cockerels quarrelling in the old moat, and the ducks disporting upon the tiny lake that gleams brightly before the southern windows. And then we enter the hall itself, and continue our chat in rooms hung round with ancestral Calverts and lined with oak panelling. We go up to the tapestried landing, pry into the mysteries of the secret staircase where Royalty has been known to hide from its persecutors, and pore upon the backs of thousands of volumes just long enough to set one wishing for a life of leisure and free access to such riches. Memoirs and travels, poetry and prose; books plainly bound, and books richly embossed seem to have overflowed their proper domain and to have settled down for good in each and every room. Here are costly mementoes from fellow Etonians, and here, locked in a casket, lies a Bible, tied with tapes, sacred relic of a fair owner who laid it aside for ever 250 years ago. Verily, as Longfellow reminds us,

> 'All houses wherein men have lived and died
> Are haunted houses;"

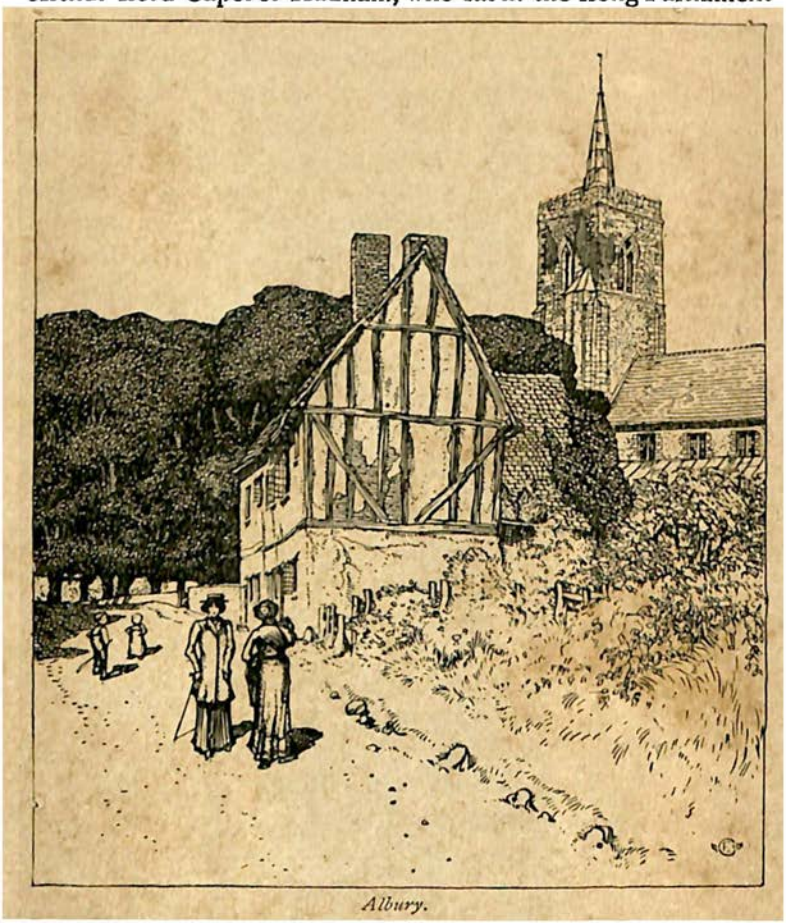
but the memories that haunt every chamber in such a house as this must be doubly sacred where, generation after generation, the men and women who graced its chambers by their presence were of the same blood; held, for the most part, the same faith, and allowed themselves to believe that their sons would in turn prove to be worthy descendants of men who fought bravely and counted death better than dishonour.

Early in the afternoon I go down into the village of Furneaux Pelham, which appears to consist of the church, a few cottages and two or three inns. There is a clock upon the

church tower; above it, in large letters, is written "Time flies"; beneath "Mind your business." There is much Early English work in this church of St. Mary; and there are more monuments than we would look to find in so remote a spot. But I am little disposed to pry into genealogies this afternoon, or to bother myself or others as to the history of Sir Walter at Lea or Johannes Barle, or of John Daniel of Felstead, so I walk through the village as far as the sign-post to Brent Pelham, where I exchange a civil word with an old man who, had his garb been appropriate, might have sat for the famous picture "One of England's Bulwarks." It was somewhere in this neighbourhood that "Johnny" lost his way one festive season many years ago. He left Much Hadham with his cart early in the morning; but, early as it was, he had thrust his nose once too often into the tankard. Now it was Johnny's business to deliver parcels at many houses in the district, and at the time of which I write it was still the custom—at any rate during Christmas time—to bestow some refreshment upon the cold but cheery carrier. So it came to pass that before Johnny had delivered one quarter of his load he began to feel exceedingly well pleased with himself, and to doubt whether the whole country, from Land's End to John o' Groats, could show his equal. Presently too, he began to entertain doubts as to the position of travellers whom he must pass, one of whom he knocked down, and had not his horse known the road even better than the driver, I hardly dare think to what strange parts Johnny might have taken his precious load. A friend in need is a friend indeed, as the carrier found. For presently he neared Bishop's Stortford, whither he was bound, and the first person he met was an old friend. The friend jumped up, took the reins, delivered the delayed parcels, and finally delivered Johnny at his own doorway, in the small hours of the morning, leaving him to explain matters to his "old woman" as best he could.

About two miles to the south from Furneaux Pelham lies the village of Albury, on the tiny river Ash; from thence it is

but a short stroll to Little Hadham, famous for its fine old hall, filled with memories of the Capels. Chief among them all was Arthur Lord Capel of Hadham, who sat in the Long Parliament



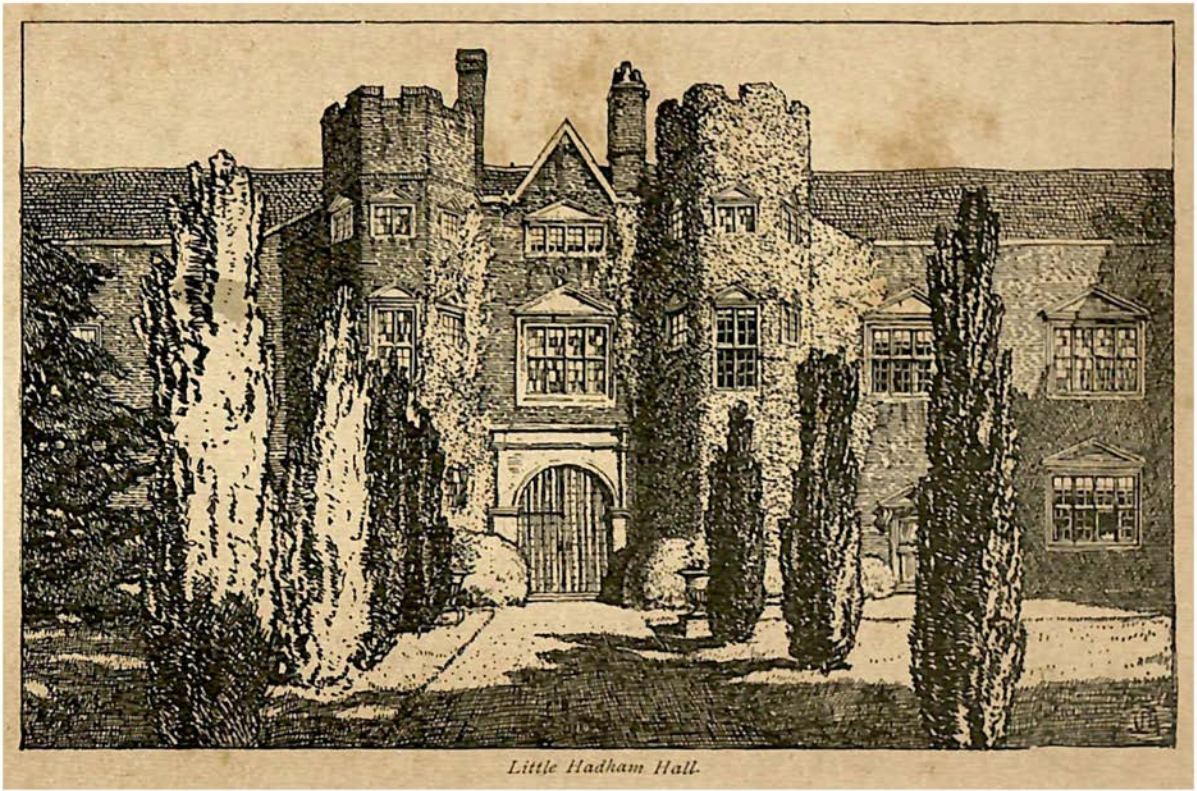
Albury.

as member for Hertfordshire. Charles I. gave him his title, and he had ample opportunities of showing his gratitude. Like his neighbour of Furneaux Pelham Hall, he raised a troop at his own charges to strike for God and King. He was a general

in the west with Hyde and Colchester; he was engaged at Exeter, Taunton and elsewhere. We find him afterwards at Colchester, assisting in the heroic effort to hold the city until the arrival of the long-promised help from Suffolk. It is matter of common knowledge that the effort was unsuccessful, for the help never arrived, the looked-for reinforcements being fully occupied in saving their own skins. The garrison of Colchester surrendered to Fairfax, after weeks of literal starvation, in August 1648. The siege had lasted for seventy-six days. I suppose Capel was a marked man from the first, by reason of his zeal for the Royalist cause; the Rev. C. Arthur Lane, in his masterly but all too brief *Church and Realm in Stuart Times*, says that he was "sent to London as a trophy for public execution." The Commons condemned him to banishment; but the leading Roundheads promptly placed him in the Tower. From the Tower he contrived to escape, and as I always admire a combination of skill, pluck and integrity, I am sorry to remember that he was re-arrested at Lambeth very soon afterwards. He was tried at Westminster for treason, and beheaded in Old Palace Yard on 9th March, 1649. His demeanour at his trial and death were such that Malcolm's words may be applied to this Lord Capel:

> "He died
> As one that had been studied in his death
> To throw away the dearest thing he owed
> As't were a careless trifle."

In the chancel of the church of St. Edmund the Martyr at Little Hadham, a church dating perhaps from the 13th century, there is a stone to the memory of this stout Royalist. His story by no means ended with his death. In the year 1703 there was found in the muniment room at Hadham Hall a silver box—the box in which the heart of Arthur Lord Capel had been placed more than fifty years before. Lord Capel, just before his death, expressed the desire that his heart might be placed in the grave of his royal master. This request was



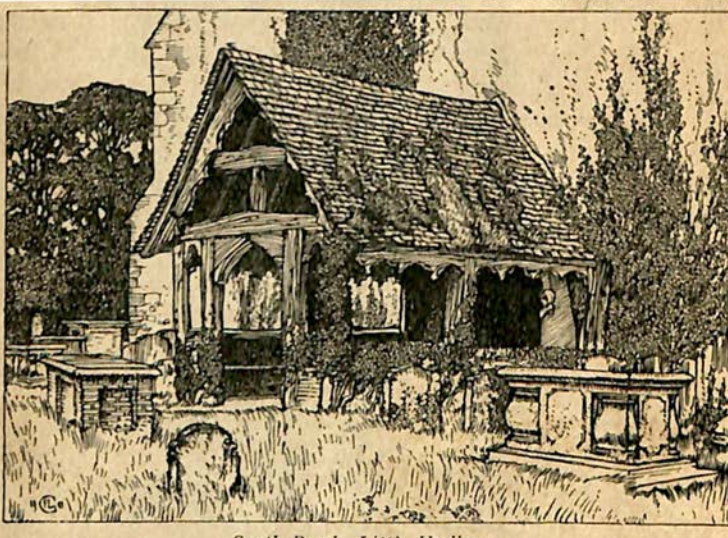
Little Hadham Hall.

uttered to Bishop Morley of Winchester, and was carefully observed; and the bishop presented this strange, touching memento to Charles II. on his restoration to the English throne. The King is believed to have sent the box to the son of the unfortunate soldier, and this explains how it came to Hadham Hall. The portrait of Arthur Lord Capel, by Janssens, hangs at Cassiobury, near to the portrait, by Lely, of his son Arthur first Earl of Essex, who was found with his throat cut after his implication in the Rye House Plot, as mentioned in my first chapter. At Little Hadham, as at Furneaux Pelham, the hall is an Elizabethan structure of red brick; hexagonal towers flank the grand entrance; the oak panelling, the mullioned windows, the spacious rooms are fine examples of domestic architecture.

This church of St. Edmund the Martyr at Little Hadham was probably—(a plague on "probably"!)—founded by Sir William Baud, one of a family to whom adventure was as the breath of their nostrils. You may read about them in the county histories. There was Simon de Baud, a trusty knight who repaired to the Holy Land in those days when a vast number of warriors were filled with a strange ardour for the name and fame of Christ; he died there during the reign of Henry II. and figures in Fuller's *Worthies*. There was Nicholas de Baud, a knight who went a-Crusading in Spain, where he spent his strength against the heathen Saracen and died at Galicia in 1189. It was his successor, Sir William Baud, who is credited with having built the parish church; a flint structure, largely Early English, with a Perpendicular pinnacled tower, and a south porch of massive timber, still wonderfully preserved. It is recorded, but I do not know upon what grounds this belief rests, that soon after Edward I. came to the throne Sir William sold the advowson of the church to the Bishop of London and his successors for ever for the sum of twenty pounds. Other Bauds of less renown, lords of the manor of Little Hadham, succeeded these; and then a

certain John Baud came upon the scene, was in due time knighted and went with Edward III. into Gascony, where he died. William Baud was sheriff for Hertfordshire and Essex represented the former county in Parliament, and died in 1375 at Little Hadham.

It is time to be moving. I am not, however, compelled to make my way into Bishop's Stortford by the shortest route; so I travel swiftly as far as to Much Hadham, once called



South Porch, Little Hadham.

Hadham Magna, and enter the village with the old windmill on my right and on my left the lane that shall lead me over the Ash towards Bishop's Stortford. I should be long indeed in reaching that venerable town were I to stay in the old *Bell Inn* whilst I set down the historic associations of Much Hadham. The tale is too long to tell; for it was here, at the Palace, that Bishop Grey kept charge over Katherine, wife of Owen Tudor, and here she gave birth to Edmund of Hadham. Here, at Moor Place, the learned Usher visited Sir Garratt

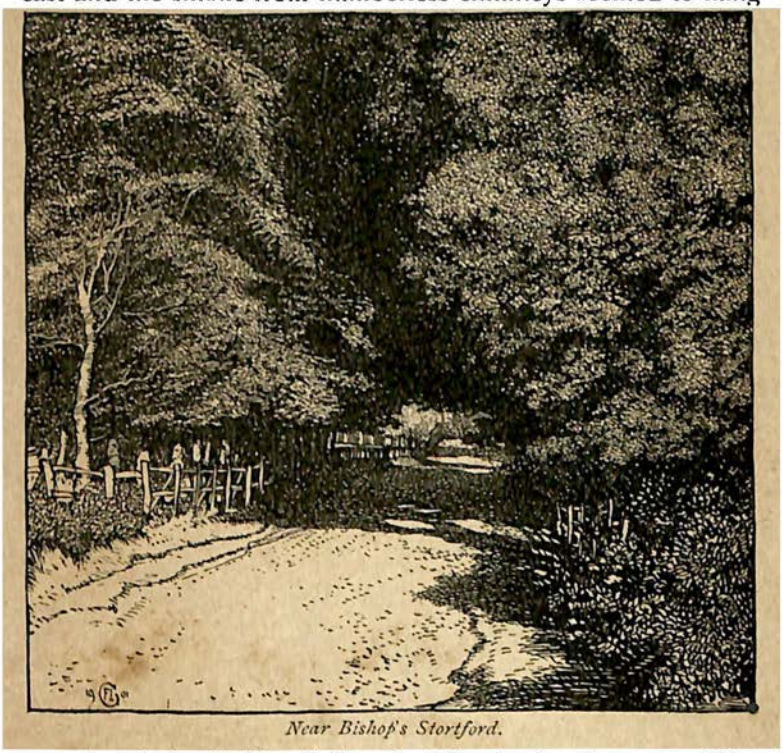
Harvey in what was then an Elizabethan manor house, long since replaced by the present mansion. Here, too, came Bishops Ridley and Bonner, as Foxe has told us, and it was from the palace of Much Hadham that Ridley went to talk with Mary Tudor at Hunsdon House, that royal retreat wherein King Henry VIII. loved to eat, drink, and be merry. Ridley was entertained by Sir Thomas Wharton until the appearance of the princess, who thanked him for his duteous consideration, and talked with him "very pleasantly." But Ridley was to ruffle her ladyship before he departed. After dinner she called him into her presence and he seized the opportunity to explain that he desired, as in duty bound, to preach before her on the following Sunday. Then the countenance of the princess was troubled—"for beautie of face she hathe few followers," wrote William Thomas—and she talked to Master Ridley in a way which must have sorely vexed that worthy prelate. She told him he might go to the neighbouring church if he pleased, for he would find the door open; moreover, he might preach there, but she refused to hear the discourse. "Madam," said Ridley, "I trust you will not refuse God's Word." Mary replied that she was uncertain as to what God's Word might mean in Ridley's mouth, and told him he would not have dared to preach his present faith in her father's days. "And as for your new bookes, I thanke God I never read none of them; never did, nor never will do." She concluded by again thanking the bishop for his attention, but spoke of his offer to preach before her in terms which provoked him to afterwards tell Sir Thomas Wharton that having drunk where God's Word had been offered and refused, it behoved him to shake the dust from his shoes as a testimony against Hunsdon House. No wonder the guests were alarmed at such words, uttered almost within the hearing of Mary—alarmed so greatly that their hair, as some of them said, stood upright on their heads.

CHAPTER XV

BISHOP'S STORTFORD, GILSTON, WIDFORD

On October 3rd, 1654, John Evelyn passed through Bishop's Stortford on his way from Saffron Walden to London, and, when noting the fact in his diary, he referred to the place as "a pretty water'd town." Chauncy, writing about forty years later, described it as situated "in a wholesome and sweet air, on a dry soil, on the east side of a hill facing the rising sun." The words of those two writers would perhaps have been very different had they approached the town on such a morning as this, and set down their impressions immediately afterwards. It has rained without ceasing since I set out from Much Hadham,—rained so heavily that I have fled to several shelters by the way and have spent most of my time standing at windows, talking to cottage folk, and watching the heavens patiently. I question whether even my Methodist friend, an old acquaint-

ance who shall be nameless, would have ventured to describe this persistent downpour as a "gracious rain." Bishop's Stortford is unquestionably a "watered town" to-day. As I paused just now on the hillside and surveyed the town spread out before me, the wind was driving the rain aslant from west to east and the smoke from numberless chimneys seemed to hang

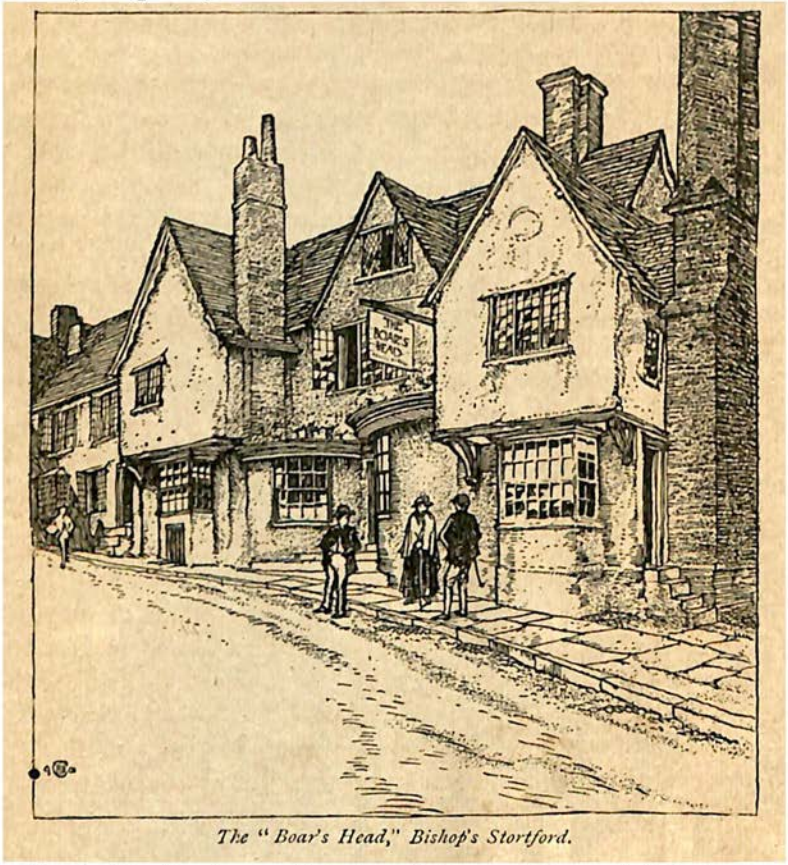


Near Bishop's Stortford.

over the whole of Bishop's Stortford like banks of vapour. Were I as averse to walking abroad on a rainy day as many men I should seek the shelter of some cosy hostel and pass the day much as it was passed by those guests of the famous Sudbury Inn who smoked and told stories in spite of

> "A cold, uninterrupted rain,
> That washed each southern window-pane
> And made a river of the road."

I go down Wind Hill leisurely, despite the rain, noticing the old *Boar's Head* upon my left and St. Michael's Church upon my right. This church has been called with reason an "imposing Perpendicular edifice." As I stand near the old



The "Boar's Head," Bishop's Stortford.

Boar's Head and scan that church from end to end, it looks as large as the fine old church at Hitchin, but more modern. It was founded in the fifteenth century on the site of a former structure, and somewhere in that sacred plot of earth the body of Editha the Fair is supposed to rest. I know not how this

may be, for the vergers show her grave in Westminster Abbey. But I am now in Bishop's Stortford, and a man in Rome should believe as Rome believes; so for to-day at least I am willing to think that as her kith and kin may be traced at Waltham Abbey it is likely enough that her ashes lie in this old town. Or perhaps a miracle explains the mystery: why may there not have been as many bodies of Editha as skulls of John the Baptist? It is strange that the tradition concerning her burial here should have lived so long if there is no truth behind it.

Editha was fair indeed, and learned, if we may trust such chroniclers as William of Malmesbury. What a halo of romance has been cast around her memory! Fairest of all the many children of Earl Godwin, she was chaste and studious; she loved especially the lore and legends of Holy Writ. Nor was she a stranger to severer studies. When, as a boy, Ingulphus plied his book at Westminster, he at times had speech with this fair lady, who would ask him of his progress in grammar and logic and reward his answers with money. Her father gave her in marriage to Edward the Confessor, but the strange, pious Anglo-Norman was a cold and ungallant lover. For six years a wife in name only, Editha shared in the disgrace that overtook her sire and brothers after that famous Witanagemot which outlawed Sweyn and banished Godwin and Harold,—the latter had held the earldom of the county in which I am rambling, then included in Essex. Her money and jewellery were taken from her and she was sent, with one serving maid to attend her, to that old Abbey of Wherwell which had been founded by Elfrith the mother of Ethelred the Unready and which was ruled over by a sister of the King. I know full well how it has been hinted that Editha was not immaculate and that her punishment was for her soul's sake; but I think only of her beauty and misfortunes. She is said to have represented the Confessor at the Consecration of Westminster Abbey. "Peace to her ashes, wheresoe'er they rest."

My thoughts are of times less ancient as I continue my way into the town and come presently to the bridge over the Stort. And perhaps, before going any farther, I may express the hope that old Stortfordians will not look for any description of their town in these pages. Description is a difficult art when the rain is running down one's neck; moreover, I must put a

The "Black Lion," Bishop's Stortford.

period to my wanderings to-day. So I seek an hour's shelter in the *Black Lion* before continuing my journey, and there, in a parlour of truly mediæval aspect, panelled with oak from floor to ceiling, I rest before the blazing fire. At this very inn, as the story goes, Bishop Bonner rested his horses during one of his many errands of persecution, and was himself doubtless regarded with wholesome respect. Once upon a time men

might quit this spot and, crossing the ford over the Stort, go up the hill towards Waytemore Castle, and see the old prison, part brick and part wood, where, in a loathsome dungeon, Bonner was wont to immure such Protestant Reformers as fell into his hands. From the prison it was but a short distance to that small green where one such prisoner perished in the flames rather than lay perjury upon his soul. I can picture the scene here and now, for an oft-related incident of that martyrdom is uppermost in my mind. On the day when that poor believer was murdered in the name of Christ there lay another victim in the prison. That victim was presently to suffer at Saffron Walden, and had asked his fellow prisoner to give him some assurance that the torment of the flames might be endured for the sake of their common Master. He was led out to foretaste his own suffering in the suffering of his friend,—a cruel custom worthy of a Sioux brave or a Dominican inquisitor. The martyr was mindful of his promise, and, as he sank under his torments, he spread his hands abroad as if embracing the flames. How is it that with such hideous stories in their memories men can seriously argue, in the daily papers, that our life is no better than life in the "good old days"?

There was trade and activity in Bishop's Stortford before the Norman set foot in England. To protect that trade and to secure his own kingly rights the Conqueror built a small castle upon a high artificial mound; the neighbouring manor he gave to Maurice, Bishop of London, and to his successors—Robert de Sigillo, Roger the Black, Henry de Sandwich, Ralph de Baldock, and many another potent and learned prelate. The castle was destroyed in the days of King John, and I have sometimes thought that the story of its destruction might furnish an historical romance. King and Pope came to loggerheads, as all the world knows, and the Pope, through the Bishops of London, Winchester, and Ely, placed our whole country under an Interdict. For four years King John and

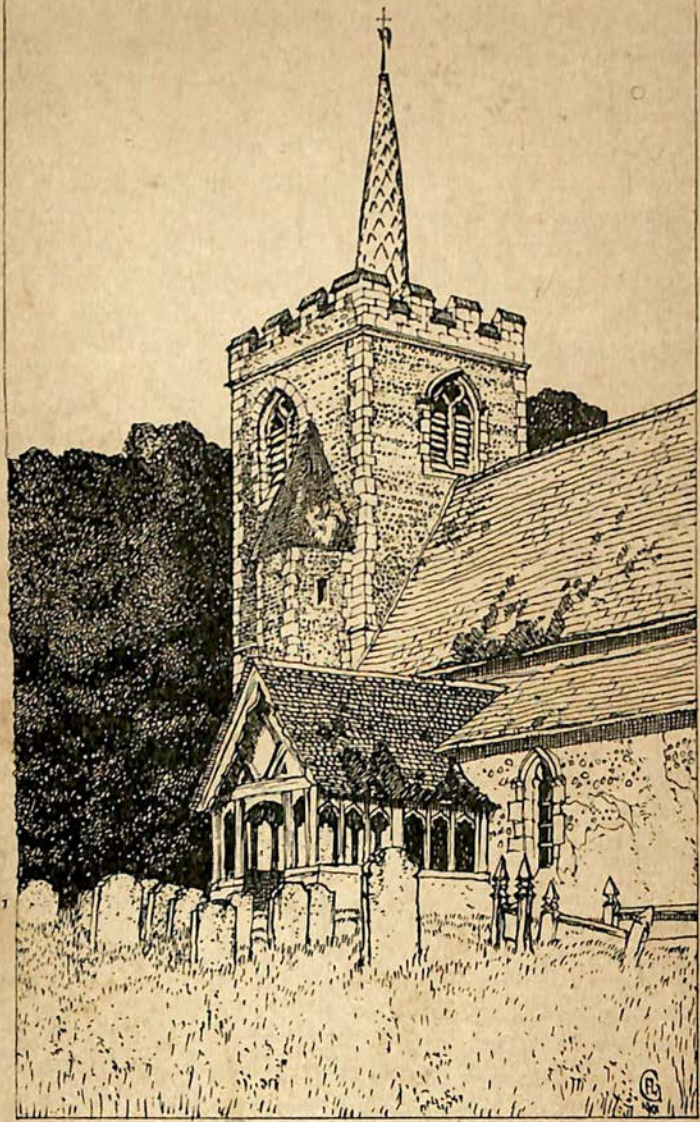
Pope Innocent III. tried to outface each other; bishoprics were placed in laymen's hands, spiritual ministrations were largely suspended; the whole country was in a turmoil. John was especially enraged by the part played in the Interdict by William, Bishop of London, so he seized the town of Bishop's Stortford and destroyed its castle. He made the town a borough and granted it Parliamentary representation; but after a while the See of London recovered its property and privileges and kept them for many a long day.

Bell Street, Sawbridgeworth.

The fates have ordained that I shall have a rough time of it to-day, and wind and rain dispute my passage. I expected nothing less, and after consulting my route decided that I must leave undone some things that I ought to have done. So I am content that all who would learn anything about Sawbridgeworth should visit that town for themselves, and should pause in Bell Street, to compare it with the drawing in this book. And from Sawbridgeworth they may stroll into Gilston and may notice, if they notice little else, the tapering flêche that

tops the church of St. Mary. The flêche is a feature common to very many churches in Hertfordshire but much less common in any other county. Why it should be more numerous in this county than elsewhere could perhaps be explained by those who can say why so many church porches in Essex are built of timber, or why, almost everywhere, the parish church is entered through a porch on its southern side. By architects such problems may be easily solved, although I cannot remember to have read their solutions.

A number of interesting facts concerning the history of the parish of Gilston were recently brought together in the pages of the *Home Counties Magazine*. The writer of the article tells us, among other things, that Mrs. Plumer of Gilston Park used to drive abroad in a four-horse chariot, which was so large that it was necessary to cut "bays" in the hedges of the lanes to enable other vehicles to pass; that in the days of Cromwell a parson at Gilston was ejected from his living because he was a "common drunkard and ale-house haunter" and received £7 in compensation, being afterwards (1660) reinstated as "Just and Lawfull Rector"; that in 1722 the school dame's salary was £2 18*s*.; that in 1741, a labourer of Gilston, named Thomas Coster, was ordered to be "publicly whipt" for theft, he having stolen ten pennyworth of bacon: that the old *Feathers Inn* has been but slightly altered since 1700. That inn, with its tiled roof, massive chimney stack, and central porch, must doubtless have sheltered many a notable person in bygone days. How irrevocably lost those days are! Only here and there God sets a man in a village who cares to record his own and his neighbours' doings, their hopes and fears, their labours and their loves. Our histories sometimes bulk large to the eye, but in truth they are pitiably meagre, and we have at times to repeat the lament that we are but of yesterday and know nothing. Where is the man who will record for us the wisdom of the Hendrys and Haggarts of other spots than "Thrums," the pathos and the pity that fill the



Gilston.

lives of the men and women of our own Drumtochty? To glance over such an article as this on Gilston is to feel that, after all, these details of life which are perhaps of the deepest human interest are but rarely recorded.

Mr. Swinburne has said that although the most beloved of English authors may be Goldsmith or may be Scott, the *best* beloved will always be Charles Lamb. I am, in no mood to argue the point, first because I am much of the same opinion and second because were it otherwise it would ill become me to dispute with Mr. Swinburne. But the dictum which I have cited came into my head forcibly just now; for as I walk towards Ware Side and Widford I am mindful that the district is strewn with memories of *Elia*. I know of few things more touching in the story of English men of letters than the love of Lamb for the highways and byways of Hertfordshire—so early nurtured, so tenaciously cherished in his later days. And here am I in the very centre of those several places which his letters and essays prove him to have loved best on earth. Canon Ainger says: "All through his life, Hertfordshire was seldom far from Charles Lamb's thoughts, and never from his heart." Again and again, in letter and essay, he bursts out with a few words of grateful remembrance or pleasing anticipation. But of the many spots that he knew so well between Cheshunt and Amwell, between Ware and Widford, none were so deeply graven on his mind as the old house at Blakesware—the "Blakesmoor" of the beautiful essay—and the little church and graveyard on the gentle slope above the river Ash. Blakesware Hall, built or rather rebuilt by Sir Thomas Levensthorpe about 1640, stood in the parish of Ware, and was for many years the seat of the Plumers. And what is left of that grand old home, where he loved, as a boy, to sit in the window seat and read Cowley, or linger in the presence of the stately Cæsars in the marble hall? There is not one stone left upon another; and the present build-

ing, the seat of Sir Martin Gosselin, does not even mark the site of the old house, for it is some quarter of a mile behind it, high on the hill.

The destruction of the old Blakesware was largely consummated before Lamb was laid to rest in that deep grave in Edmonton churchyard. He has recorded his impressions when, having one day turned aside to view his beloved Blakesmoor once again, he found it reduced to an antiquity:—

"Journeying northward lately" (he says in the *Elia* essay, "Blakesmoor in H ——shire"), "I could not resist going some few miles out of my road to look upon the remains of an old great house with which I had been impressed in this way in infancy. I was apprised that the owner of it had lately pulled it down; still I had a vague notion that it could not all have perished, that so much solidity with magnificence could not have been crushed all at once into the mere dust and rubbish which I found it.

"The work of ruin had proceeded with a swift hand indeed, and the demolition of a few weeks had reduced it to—an antiquity.

"I was astonished at the indistinction of everything. Where had stood the great gates? What bounded the court-yard? Whereabout did the out-houses commence? a few bricks only lay as representatives of that which was so stately and so spacious.

"Death does not shrink up his human victim at this rate. The burnt ashes of a man weigh more in their proportion.

"Had I seen these brick-and-mortar knaves at their process of destruction, at the plucking of every panel, I should have felt the varlets at my heart. I should have cried out to them to spare a plank at least out of the cheerful store-room, in whose hot-window seat I used to sit and read Cowley, with the grass-plat before, and the hum and flappings of that one solitary wasp that ever haunted it about me—it is in mine ears now, as oft as summer returns; or a panel of the yellow room.

"Why, every plank and panel of that house for me had magic in it. The tapestried bed-rooms—tapestry so much better than painting—not adorning merely, but peopling the wainscots—at which childhood ever and anon would steal and look, shifting its coverlid (replaced as quickly) to exercise its tender courage in a momentary eye-encounter with those stern bright visages, staring reciprocally—all Ovid on the walls, in colours vivider than his descriptions. Actæon in mid sprout, with the unappeasable prudery of Diana; and the still more provoking, and almost culinary coolness of Dan Phœbus, eel-fashion, deliberately divesting of Marsyas.

"Then, that haunted room—in which old Mrs. Battle died—whereinto I have crept, but always in the day-time, with a passion of fear; and a sneaking curiosity, terror-tainted, to hold communication with the past.—*How shall they build it up again?*"

This old house had come to be, in a certain sense, Lamb's home even more than it was the home of its owners. It belonged to the Plumer family, but William Plumer, the member for Higham Ferrers, preferred to live at his neighbouring house at Gilston, leaving Blakesware in the charge of its housekeeper, Mary Field, and Lamb's grandmother, to maintain in its old state. Hence when the young Lambs came down into Hertfordshire from the Temple on a visit to their grandmother—first John and Mary, and afterwards Charles, their junior by several years—they had the run of the rooms and grounds, and practically were in their own second home. In the *Elia* essay, "Dream Children," Lamb recalls these old days as he describes his grandmother to the little imaginary John and Alice:—

"Then I told how good she was to all her grandchildren, having us to the great house in the holidays, where I in particular used to spend many hours by myself, in gazing upon the old busts of the Twelve Cæsars, that had been Emperors of Rome, till the old marble heads would seem to live again,

or I to be turned into marble with them; how I never could be tired with roaming about that huge mansion, with its vast empty rooms, with their worn-out hangings, fluttering tapestry, and carved oaken panels, with the gilding almost rubbed out—sometimes in the spacious old-fashioned gardens, which I had almost to myself, unless when now and then a solitary gardening man would cross me—and how the nectarines and peaches hung upon the walls, without my ever offering to pluck them, because they were forbidden fruit, unless now and then,—and because I had more pleasure in strolling about among the old melancholy-looking yew trees, or the firs, and picking up the red berries, and the fir apples, which were good for nothing but to look at—or in lying about upon the fresh grass, with all the fine garden smells around me—or basking in the orangery, till I could almost fancy myself ripening too along with the oranges and the limes in that grateful warmth—or in watching the dace that darted to and fro in the fish-pond, at the bottom of the garden, with here and there a great sulky pike hanging midway down the water in silent state, as if it mocked at their impertinent friskings,—I had more pleasure in these busy-idle diversions than in all the sweet flavours of peaches, nectarines, oranges, and such like common baits of children."

Mrs. Field died in 1792, and it was not until 1823 or 1824 that Lamb went to visit the old spot on hearing that the Hall was to be demolished. But it must often have been in his thoughts when, with his chest against the "desk's dull wood," he lived laborious days in the old India House in Leadenhall Street. A drawing of Blakesware Hall was executed by an artist for a Grangerised copy of Clutterbuck's *Hertfordshire*, and was reproduced in an early number of the *English Illustrated Magazine*.

Mrs. Field's grave (the name is by an accident spelt Feild) may still be seen in Widford churchyard, a few hundred yards up the road from Blakesware. One of Lamb's tenderest poems was written on the occasion of her death. I make no apology

for giving it here, for the neighbourhood can never have known a worthier lady.

THE GRANDAME.

On the green hill top,
Hard by the house of prayer, a modest roof,
And not distinguish'd from its neighbour barn,
Save by a slender-tapering length of spire,
The Grandame sleeps. A plain stone barely tells
The name and date to the chance passenger.
For lowly born was she, and long had eat,
Well-earn'd, the bread of service:—hers was else
A mounting spirit, one that entertain'd
Scorn of base action, deed dishonourable,
Or aught unseemly. I remember well
Her reverend image: I remember too,
With what a zeal she served her master's house;
And how the prattling tongue of garrulous age
Delighted to recount the oft-told tale
Of anecdote domestic. Wise she was,
And wondrous skill'd in genealogies,
And could in apt and voluble terms discourse
Of births, of titles, and alliances;
Of marriages, and intermarriages;
Relationship remote, or near of kin;
Of friends offended, family disgraced.
Maiden high-born, but wayward, disobeying
Parental strict injunctions, and regardless
Of unmix'd blood, and ancestry remote,
Stooping to wed with one of low degree.
But these are not thy praises; and I wrong
Thy honour'd memory, recording chiefly
Things light or trivial. Better 'twere to tell,
How with a nobler zeal, and warmer love,
She served her *heavenly Master*. I have seen
That reverend form bent down with age and pain,
And rankling malady: yet not for this
Ceased she to praise her Maker, or withdraw
Her trust from him, her faith, and humble hope;
So meekly had she learn'd to bear her cross—
For she had studied patience in the school
Of Christ; much comfort she had thence derived,
And was a *follower* of the Nazarene.

Widford Church still has a "slender-tapering length of spire," but it is not the same as that described by Lamb. It was renewed quite recently, with much taste and veneration for architectural fitness.

At *The Fox* at Ware Side, by the way, I hear a story which for the moment banishes from my memory the gentle Elia and all his doings. Some years ago there stood upon this spot an old thatched wayside inn, kept by a man named Clibbons. Now Clibbons, like Jack o' Legs, was wont to increase his income by nefarious practices. He went regularly to Hertford market to sell cakes, which was well enough; but I am sorry to say that he added to his cake-selling a worse occupation. He used to frequent the busiest inns in the town and listen furtively to the farmers and other country-folk as they chatted over their ale. When he heard that George Turmut or Jack Shorthorn had taken a good round sum for their beasts he would waylay them as they were returning home and ease them of their money. Folks at Ware Side tell me that in the garden of *The Fox* there was formerly a small cave in which Clibbons carefully hid his ill-gotten cash and, when danger threatened, would hide there himself. One day as he was returning from market in a very ill humour he met a farmer between Widford and Ware Side. He was about to rob the farmer when a third party came up; the farmer shouted that he was likely to be murdered and the stranger shot the cakeman on the spot. Acting on the good old adage that it is useless to cry over spilt milk, the farmer placed the body of Clibbons in his own cart and drove it to *The Fox*, where he was met upon the threshold by the cakeman's wife, who said she knew her man was dead an hour ago, for she had received a token from another world! I doubt whether anybody, man or woman, who has not had much personal talk with the older folk in our more quiet villages, is aware how superstitious such persons often are even in the present day. If the candle burns down in a peculiar manner and the tallow assumes the form of a winding sheet there

is death at the door. If you have warts you had better steal a piece of beef and bury it, and as the beef decays the warts will disappear. There are still old women who believe that their infirmities would be healed by the royal touch, and bemoan their inability to receive it; there are still old men who believe that if the horseshoe fell from their doorway in the night sorrow would come in the morning.

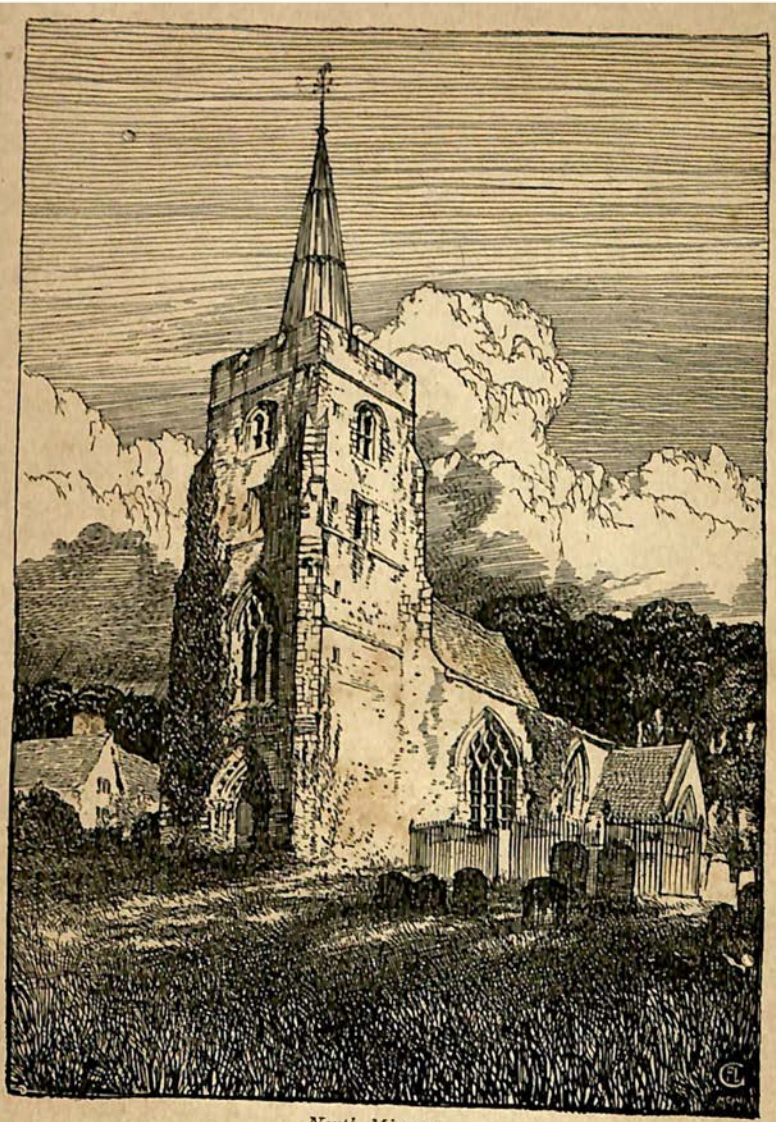
I suppose it is true that truth is stranger than fiction, but sometimes the details of "mere fiction" sink more deeply into the heart of man than the details of fact. Lombard Street is to Mr. Lang the place "where Becky Sharp went," and I am not ashamed to own that Widford is associated in my mind with Rosamund Gray and Allan Clare in Lamb's story *Rosamund Gray*. It was close by, at Blenheim, that old Margaret Gray sat spinning in the arbour before her cottage on that warm day upon which the story opens. That cottage was rebuilt many years ago, but I think I see it now—the biggest room upstairs where Margaret slept, the closet where she died kneeling, her arms stretched out upon the bed where Rosamund was not. I see that revered family Bible so lovingly wrapt in a case of green velvet with gold tassels—the Bible into which the fair young Rosamund dared not peer without Margaret's sanction. Here, on this table, is the cookery book with the rosemary and lavender between the leaves; here, too, "*Pilgrim's Progress*—the first part"; here are the octavo prayer-book by Baskerville, the *Complete Angler* and *Withers' Emblems*. I can see Allan Clare as he places his basket of peaches in the arbour, and proffers those few fragrant roses to Rosamund; I see him bear her pitcher from the well on that day when their eyes first met: and presently, see the story of Paolo and Francesca in part re-acted, and the world transmuted for Allan Clare and Rosamund Gray. I see the fair young girl as she quits the cottage on that fateful night, turning to make fast the latch before she goes. I see her wander distraught in the fields at daybreak, "an

abandoned thing, polluted and disgraced"; I see Elinor's embrace clasp her inert and unresponding form.

But Blenheim and Widford have another and even closer connection with Lamb than comes from the scene of *Rosamund Gray* being laid here. It was at Blenheim probably that Alice W—— lived, the fair-haired maid of Lamb's early love sonnets, whom he might have married had not tragedy come into his life and changed his ways completely. Alice W——, the Anne of the sonnets, whether Lamb loved her with any more than a boy's romantic fervour or not, was for some months the dearest thing in life to him; and it was in the Widford country that they walked and talked together. The "winding wood-walks green" of the following beautiful sonnet are between Widford and Blenheim:—

> When last I roved these winding wood-walks green,
> Green winding walks, and shady pathways sweet,
> Oft-times would Anna seek the silent scene,
> Shrouding her beauties in the lone retreat.
> No more I hear her footsteps in the shade:
> Her image only in these pleasant ways
> Meets me self-wandering, where in happier days
> I held free converse with the fair-hair'd maid.
> I pass'd the little cottage which she loved,
> The cottage which did once my all contain:
> It spake of days which ne'er must come again,
> Spake to my heart, and much my heart was moved.
> "Now fair befall thee, gentle maid!" said I,
> And from the cottage turn'd me with a sigh.

I am at the end of my wanderings. There are many spots of interest which I have failed to visit, as I shall surely be told before I am much older, and there are other spots which, having visited, I have dismissed with brief words which may ill suffice in the eyes of men who love those places well. Had I lingered in every village where I have wished to linger I might have written three volumes instead of one. I might have gone to Cheshunt, where John Tillotson was



North Mimms.

once a curate boarding with Sir Thomas Dacres at "the great house near the church," and might there have remembered how he once argued with that old anabaptist and Cromwellian soldier who preached to the villagers in a red coat,—argued with such success that the Dissenter ceased to dispute the supremacy of the vicar in matters spiritual, followed John Tillotson's advice, and betook himself to "some honest employment." I might have gone to Little Berkhampstead, where Thomas Ken was born, and where Lamb lost his way upon the heath after visiting Northaw, where he had refreshed himself with ale in the back parlour. At Bayfordbury I might have sought permission to look at the famous portraits of the worthies of the Kit-Cat Club, painted by Sir Godfrey Kneller. I could have wished to go on pilgrimage to North Mimms, one of the prettiest spots in Hertfordshire, where Sir Thomas More lived awhile at *Gobions*, long since demolished, and where, at *Brookmans*, the munificent Somers pored upon his pamphlets, books and prints, tasting, in the intervals of a busy life, the sweets of literature's "pale and shadowy, but enduring pleasures." I have omitted to visit Barnet, where Oliver Twist met the artful Dodger, not because there is nothing in Barnet of interest, but because a large part of the immediate neighbourhood is in Middlesex. I have omitted to visit Dyrham Park, where the famous arch, erected by Monk, in London, stands at the entrance to the grounds. A few years ago, when the pond at Dyrham Park was dragged, a large bell was found which was deemed worthy of acceptance by the British Museum. By the kindness of Dr. Fox, of New Barnet, I have seen four photographs of that curious bell. Around it, standing out clearly, are the words :—

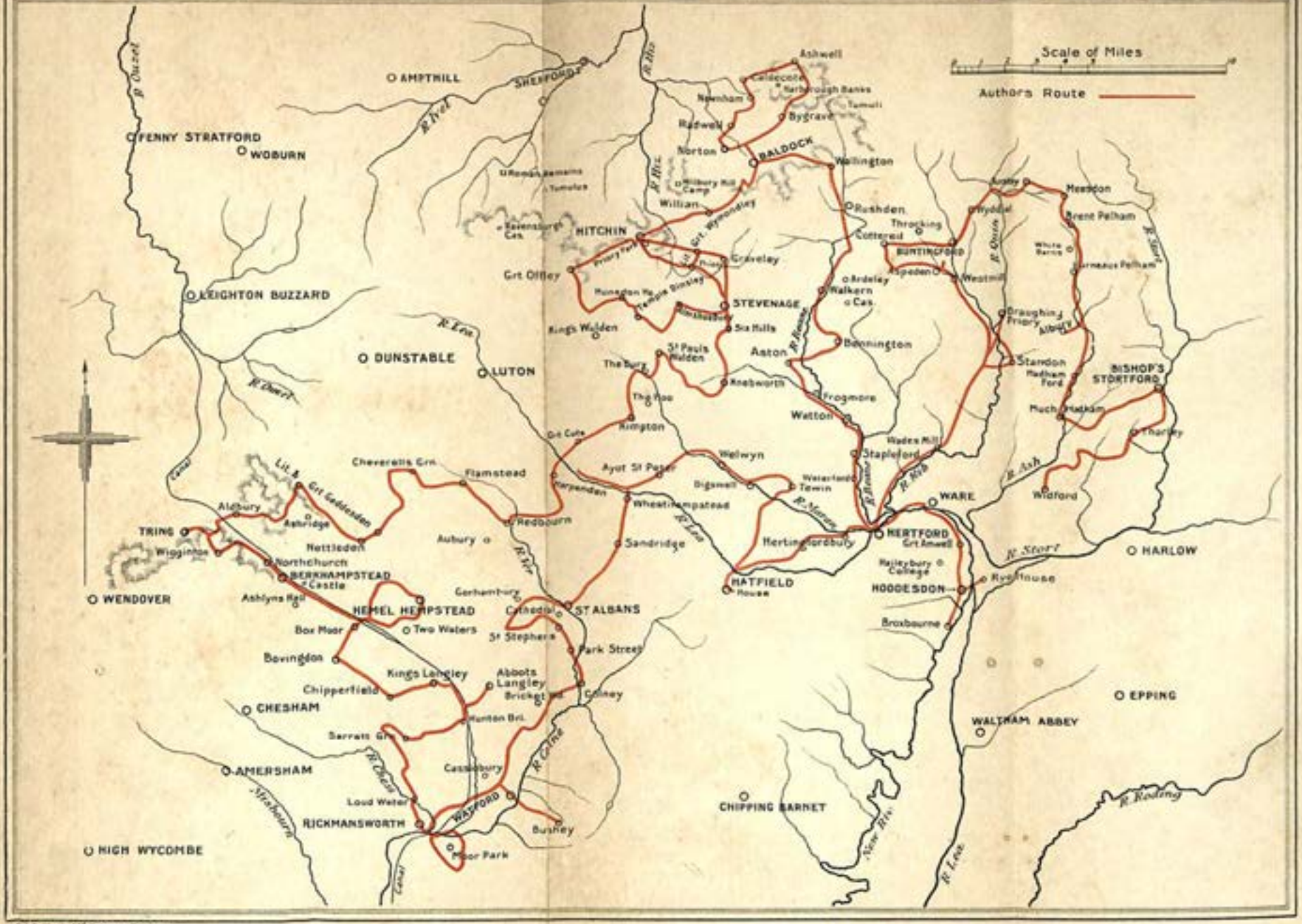
MARC LE SER HEFT MEI GHEGOTEN MV^{c} LXXIIII ;

and three bas-reliefs of questionable signification, one of which probably represents Fame writing upon tablets and another Abraham's sacrifice. It also bears the bust of Philip of Spain,

who ruled Flanders when "Marc le Ser" cast the bell. It has been thought that the bell was lowered into the pond in order that it might escape the eyes of the Roundheads when they marched to London.

And so, having duly repented of my shortcomings, I make an end to this book within sight of Widford. My last thought is of the childhood of those two wholly unique figures in English Literature, Charles and Mary Lamb. As children they walked together to the village church,—who can doubt, asks Canon Ainger, that the church referred to in *Mrs. Leicester's School*, where the father of Elizabeth Villiers was curate, was at Widford, "where Mary Lamb had so often listened to good Mr. Hambly on the hot summer Sundays"? And of what church, if not of this upon the hillside near the river Ash, was the inimitable essayist thinking when he wrote these simple words? "But wouldst thou know the beauty of holiness?—go alone on some week-day, borrowing the keys of good Master Sexton, traverse the cool aisles of some country church: think of the piety that has kneeled there—the congregations, old and young, that have found consolation there,—the meek pastor—the docile parishioner. With no disturbing emotions, no cross conflicting comparisons, drink in the tranquillity of the place, till thou thyself become as fixed and motionless as the marble effigies that kneel and weep around thee." To me, and I suppose to many others, such memories add much to the pleasure which we derive from our rambles in the highways and byways of our native land. If in early life we have nurtured that love of reading which Gibbon said he would not exchange for the treasures of India, we are likely to reap the richer harvest when, as we journey from place to place, the burial places of the memory give up their dead, or rather their living. But perhaps—I hardly know—our purest pleasures are due to our love for the country itself rather than to our remembrances of men. Few of us are untouched by that beauty which is to be found in grove

and field—the tangled, scented woods at early dawn; the lowland meadows so bright with blossom; the ripple of the wayside streamlet; the song of birds. "I feel the flowers growing over me," said Keats, as Severn watched him slowly die at Rome. The greatest of all dramatists is true to nature, as ever, when, in describing the death of Falstaff, he tells us that as the old reprobate passed away at the turning of the tide he fumbled with the sheets, played with flowers, and babbled o' green fields.



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